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Monday 3 October 2016

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Lundi 3 octobre 2016

**Standing Committee on
Justice Policy**

**Comité permanent
de la justice**

Ontario Rebate for Electricity
Consumers Act, 2016

Loi de 2016 sur la remise
de l'Ontario pour
les consommateurs d'électricité

Chair: Shafiq Qadri
Clerk: Christopher Tyrell

Président : Shafiq Qadri
Greffier : Christopher Tyrell

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LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
JUSTICE POLICY**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT
DE LA JUSTICE**

Monday 3 October 2016

Lundi 3 octobre 2016

The committee met at 0801 in committee room 1.

**ONTARIO REBATE FOR ELECTRICITY
CONSUMERS ACT, 2016**

**LOI DE 2016 SUR LA REMISE
DE L'ONTARIO POUR**

LES CONSOMMATEURS D'ÉLECTRICITÉ

Consideration of the following bill:

Bill 13, An Act in respect of the cost of electricity /
Projet de loi 13, Loi concernant le coût de l'électricité.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, colleagues. I'll convene the meeting to order. The Standing Committee on Justice Policy, as you know, is here to consider Bill 13, An Act in respect of the cost of electricity. We have a very full day, with five minutes per presenter and three minutes to each party, in rotation, for questions.

ONTARIO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): We'll begin with our first presenter of the day, Ms. Ashley Challinor, director of policy for the Ontario Chamber of Commerce. Ms. Challinor, you have five minutes in which to make your opening address, and the timings will be enforced with military precision. I invite you to begin now.

Ms. Ashley Challinor: Well, good morning, and thank you. I won't take up the full five minutes, but I do have a quick statement regarding Bill 13.

As you know, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce has been very actively involved in the electricity file for the past couple of years, but we are seeing some progress that is making us and our members a bit more optimistic.

For Ontario's business community, the most important announcement in the recent speech from the throne was the expansion of the industrial conservation initiative. As we've learned through the Ontario Energy Report, class A industrial ratepayers have a relatively competitive rate with jurisdictions where Ontario does business. However, class B ratepayers are much less competitive and have been falling further and further behind. One of the reasons class A rates are so much more competitive is because since 2011, they have been eligible for the industrial conservation initiative, which incentivizes the shifting of power away from peak days.

With the announcement that the industrial conservation initiative will be expanded so that any company that consumes more than one megawatt will be eligible, another 1,000 companies will benefit from the plan. By simply enrolling in the program, these thousand companies could each save 14% on their electricity bill. Depending on their ability to reduce peak electricity consumption, they could save up to 34%. We think this is great news for companies that have struggled with rising electricity costs.

That said, we want to highlight three concerns. First, businesses will need to opt into the program. We need to ensure that all businesses are aware of the opportunity for savings and have access to it. Second, ICI savings are only relevant to those companies that can shift their consumption. Where is the relief for businesses that are left out? Finally, the program may not be fully implemented until after the general election in 2018. We need to ensure that this government and any future government do not kick ICI expansion down the road.

The government also announced that they intend to enable a rebate equal to the provincial HST rate on consumers' residential electricity bills, impacting roughly five million families, farms and small businesses. This will help offset the \$1 increase this ICI expansion will cost residential consumers.

While we are pleased with these policy changes, there are underlying issues impacting the price of electricity that still need to be addressed. That's why the OCC will continue to advocate for a transparent dialogue around the price of electricity in Ontario. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you very much, Ms. Challinor. We'll invite our Conservative colleagues to begin the day: Three minutes, gentlemen. Mr. Yakabuski?

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much for joining us today, Ashley. You talked about the ICI program and offered the necessary platitudes to the government, as it always has to be that way. But then, you also talked about the weaknesses in the program. How many of your businesses, on a percentage basis, are going to—you know, the number of businesses in the Ontario Chamber of Commerce versus the number that would be actually able to benefit by the expansion of the ICI program?

Ms. Ashley Challinor: I don't have those exact numbers. The vast majority of businesses within the Ontario Chamber of Commerce, like the vast majority of

businesses within Ontario, are small, and so will not be able to take advantage of the ICI expansion. For some of them, the HST rate rebate may be appropriate, but not all.

Overall, something that the OCC has been saying is that when it comes to electricity prices, there's no silver bullet. There's no one thing that's going to lower rates or impact all sizes of business or all consumers of electricity. This is, in part, because the reason why electricity rates have been rising is dependent on a number of different factors. There are going to be a number of different solutions.

Mr. John Yakabuski: A lot of your members, or probably a larger percentage of your members, would they more look like this: a restaurant that operates primarily in the daytime hours in small-town Ontario that has no ability to shift their load off peak times and is below the threshold of the one-megawatt usage—and also 8% versus what they've been forced to pay in addition over the last several years? Are your members saying that's sufficient?

Ms. Ashley Challinor: No, and as I noted, there are some businesses that simply can't shift consumption. So this will—

Mr. John Yakabuski: So there's no help for them in this bill?

Ms. Ashley Challinor: Absolutely.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The vast majority of your members probably fit more into that category than outside of that category.

Ms. Ashley Challinor: It depends on the sector—but quite a number of them, especially, as you said, restaurants or retail.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Right. Now, you're here today as the first witness. Do you think there was enough lead time—we have one day of hearings with essentially one day of notice because the bill only passed second reading on Thursday. If it only passed second reading, do you think there was enough time for people to get their names in as possible witnesses here before this committee?

Ms. Ashley Challinor: As you can see, I was reading from my phone, which I think probably answers your question.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Yakabuski. Mr. Tabuns.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Military precision.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you for being here this morning, Ms. Challinor.

Ms. Ashley Challinor: Thank you.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Are there any amendments that you suggest to this bill?

Ms. Ashley Challinor: Not to this bill specifically. The work that we've done on electricity prices has been at a larger scale. We released a report last year that looked at more systemic changes rather than quite specific policy changes.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Does the Ontario Chamber of Commerce support this bill?

Ms. Ashley Challinor: We do, but, like I said, we think this is a piece of a larger puzzle of working on this issue.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The comment you made that the industrial conservation initiative won't be fully implemented until after the next election—

Ms. Ashley Challinor: I said "may." There's been, I believe, no firm decision on exactly when the rebate will start; if it will be pro-rated etc. We want to flag that just in case.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay. I don't have any further questions. Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Tabuns. To the government side: Mr. Delaney.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you, Chair, and good morning to you. You made an interesting comment earlier that I'd like to perhaps have you expand on. How might eligible businesses be better able to understand or be more aware of the ICI program?

Ms. Ashley Challinor: This is something we've actually been thinking about for a while, and we briefly discussed with the Ministry of Energy. There's a lot of misunderstanding and misinformation about how electricity rates are actually calculated. We've been asking the government to be more transparent on that issue, but we also know that there are a number of programs and initiatives out there to help businesses deal with energy costs.

Unfortunately, not all of our members have heard of these programs, are aware of how they can access them and so on. We would like to hopefully make an effort, aligned with government, to improve education, so to speak, to make our members and all businesses aware of what is available to help them, but also make sure that they understand how their electricity rates are set because, right now, there's a lot of confusion and, as I said, misinformation about that.

Mr. Bob Delaney: And you're aware, of course, that for businesses falling below the one-megawatt threshold that constitutes eligibility for the ICI, there is a suite of other programs?

Ms. Ashley Challinor: Yes, but our members are not as aware of that as we are.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you, Chair. We have no further questions.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Delaney. Thanks to you, Ms. Challinor, for your deputa- tion on behalf of the Ontario Chamber of Commerce.

Ms. Ashley Challinor: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Our next presenter is Mr. Larry Morrison. We are attempting to get him via teleconference. Have we been successful there? No.

Is Mr. Greg Vezina here, from Canadian Alternative Energy Corp.?

Mr. Arthur Potts: Vezina? As in Vezina Trophy?

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Yes. The spelling is different, but thanks, Mr. Potts, for that contribution.

Mr. Wettlaufer?

If we cannot locate any of the next three presenters, we'll need to recess till 8:30, approximately.

Interjection.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): The next three are not around. Two of them are by teleconference, so that's part of the issue.

We're going to recess until 8:30 a.m.

The committee recessed from 0812 to 0829.

CANADIAN ALTERNATIVE ENERGY CORP.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Okay, colleagues. Thank you for your patience. We have our next presenter before us: Mr. Greg Vezina of the Canadian Alternative Energy Corp. Mr. Vezina, you'll understand you have five minutes in which to make your opening address, and then questions with each party in rotation. I'd invite you to please begin now.

Mr. Greg Vezina: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning. There are three points I want to bring up regarding this bill and the logic behind it.

We have two Auditor General reports that noted that the government did not do the necessary cost-benefit, site location, grid or excess capacity, or other analysis before and subsequent to passing and implementing the Green Energy Act.

The supply of power in Ontario does not include any life cycle, health or environmental cost analysis, nor are any of those costs included in the price.

No government or public sector company can be expected to make decisions regarding major investments for provision of services unless the real costs of doing so are known and predictable, and that is our problem with electricity prices in Ontario.

I have three recommendations. They're rather simple. First, require all power supply contracts to include a complete cost-benefit analysis; allow First Nations, community and public utility supply, management and utilization from new groups—and open up competition to everybody and let lower-cost providers provide, assuming that someone else is not paying their environmental bill.

I'm not going to go through the rest of this, other than to state that I've spent 40 years trying to convince politicians that ammonia is a fuel. They get this in the US. They get this in Japan. They get this in China. The one province where they don't get this is this one. Even the Harper government classified ammonia as a fuel and did research into ammonia fuel cells and wind-to-hydrogen ammonia plants. Siemens Corp. is now starting to build wind-to-ammonia plants in Europe to use up excess power.

I spent half a million dollars and two years going through two applications for funding with this Ontario government after spending three years being told that this is where I go. When I got there, we were refused. So I hired the University of Ontario to do the research to prove the net life cycle costs, the health and environmental costs, of energy.

Hybrids are three times as bad as gasoline and batteries are five times as bad as gasoline, and we're sub-

siding with taxpayers' money. We need a level playing field. We need for new technologies to be able to compete without qualifying for government grants. The same thing applies to petroleum and hydrocarbons, which we subsidize.

This document has the research that proves beyond a doubt that we've been right for 40 years. I think this government has an opportunity to hit "reset" now. I think this government has an opportunity to undo some of the decisions that will have the longer-term consequences, and I invite the committee to explore those opportunities.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): We'll begin with the NDP side. Mr. Tabuns, you have three minutes.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you for being here this morning, Mr. Vezina.

The first recommendation, "Require all future electrical power supply contracts to include a complete cost-benefit analysis": Can you enlarge on that?

Mr. Greg Vezina: One of the problems with green energy that we've actually found out from Europe is that you need four times the capacity to manage it if you're going to put it on the grid. In the UK, what they did was, they didn't put green energy on the grid; they backed it all up with diesel power. We've got that issue in northern Ontario with native communities. We're going to build a transmission line to nowhere and we're going to back it up with diesel power for 40 years. The University of Ontario says we can do it with ammonia for a quarter of the cost and a quarter of the emissions.

If the true life cycle numbers, if the cost to create, to manage and dispose of energy was in the price, most of the things we think are winners are not, and most of the things we think are losers are not. But what is fundamental to understand is that when you add ammonia to the mix of hydrocarbons or when you add ammonia to the mix of renewables, you get storage, you get clean tech and you get it for half the price. That is what I've really been trying to prove to politicians for 40 years.

You've got to look at the big picture. When you look at the big picture, you get some surprising numbers. That's what I mean by full life cycle costs. All of the costs—implementation, grid management, power storage, distribution—have to be in the price. In a province as large as Ontario, 50% of our power is lost just in distribution. Forget line losses. It becomes compelling to generate power locally, even if it's more expensive over a five- or 10-year period, because over a 40-year period of a power plant, it's going to be much cheaper.

I hope I've answered your question.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Yes, you have. Thank you. And I don't have further. I'm happy to cede the floor.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Tabuns.

To the government side: Mr. Potts.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Mr. Vezina, it's nice to see you again.

Mr. Greg Vezina: It's nice to see you, Arthur.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Nothing much has changed. You're still full of the passion that I've known you to have for this file for years and years gone by—

Mr. Greg Vezina: Thank you.

Mr. Arthur Potts: —when we first met on this file, maybe six or seven years ago, with our mutual friend. I took a lot of time, actually, on my own dime, to try to validate these kinds of things, to see if there wasn't something behind here. I've got to tell you, I have put your proposition in front of some of the smartest people I know: people from Magna automotive, Ford, Toyota, a lot of scientists I know who specialize particularly in the field of hydrogen, and they all look at me and say, "Why would you do that?"

Mr. Greg Vezina: Well, that's—

Mr. Arthur Potts: I'm not asking that question. They take a look and say, "Why would you use ammonia?" Ammonia's a very complex molecule that is a by-product of another chemical process, and if you wanted to access hydrocarbons, and hydrogen particularly, there are a lot of other pre-steps and you could do that in a lot more efficient manner. So why would you go down the road of creating ammonia to do the storage when you could be storing pure hydrogen, for instance? Then, when you're combusting ammonia, you have to deal with all those other elements within that molecule, which could be precursors to smog, acid rain and a whole bunch of other—salts and chlorides and such like that. So this has been the concern.

What I have found in my attempting to move your agenda forward is, they're less than enthusiastic about the kinds of things you've been talking about. You've been at this, as you say, for 40 years. I admire that tenacity, but I can't help but think that you've got a technology that if you put it in front of the dragons, if you had gone on the Dragons' Den, even someone as nice as Mr. Chilton might just look at you and say, "It's time to shift. Why would you go down that route?"

I'll leave you with that. I think Mr. Chilton and others would actually look at this and say, "We're out."

Mr. Greg Vezina: None of these companies invest in technology until they're mature. Magna does not invent leading-end products. Magna builds OEM products, sir, and your experts are the reason that your government's in the trouble it's in, because every one of the experts you rely on has an inherent conflict of interest to protect their own business.

The research is there. This government can continue to ignore the science and economics as long as you want, but I now have peer-reviewed, proven research from 10 universities that show hydrogen is more—

Mr. Arthur Potts: So I ask you the question: Why in all these years—

Mr. Greg Vezina: I'm trying to answer. Hydrogen is more difficult, more expensive, more explosive and a much, much harder life cycle to use.

Again, the market for this technology is not the family car. The market for this technology is diesel generators, industrial use, HVAC and power. The University of Ontario has a patent on an ammonia engine that uses ammonia to provide the heating and cooling without burning fuel. It's 60% efficient. Toyota has a similar patent.

Mr. Arthur Potts: But I—

Mr. Greg Vezina: Guess who's getting into the business, Arthur? Toyota's getting into business in Europe.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Potts.

To the PC side: Mr. Hillier.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Greg, for being here. You're familiar with the legislative process. You've been around the block over the years. I'm just going to ask you this. We know that this bill was passed on Thursday, about noon time. At 3 p.m. on Friday, people had to have their requests in to appear before this committee and then the committee started its hearings at 8 a.m. this morning. I'd like if you could comment. Do you think that is a reasonable period of time for interested parties to examine the bill, put together a presentation and even to be aware that there are committee hearings, if you may?

Mr. Greg Vezina: Look, the other windmill I tilt at is democracy—real democracy, real transparency, real accountability etc. I don't know what the government's issues were and the reasons behind the government introducing the bill, voting on the bill, sending it to committee and having the hearings instantly. I don't know how long these committee hearings are going to go.

What I do know is, when I found out about this on Friday morning, I communicated with the Clerk of the Committee and I was scheduled to be here. Regardless of the inadequacies of the process, the bottom line is, those of us who care enough and who are aware enough about these issues can be heard. Now I think there are questions about—there are a lot of people who aren't going to be heard, but I'd like to leave that to the committee to argue about. I don't want to take a position—

Mr. Randy Hillier: I'm just looking for your opinion here. Sixteen people have been slotted in for the one day of hearings. We actually have four hours of committee hearings on this major bill—four hours. We can see from the stack of requests there was quite a number of people who wanted to attend this committee hearing, but there is no room for them, or just having those four hours available on such short notice, they could not attend on our schedule, and that's the point I was getting at. I'm sure there are many others than 16 people who want to be here to share with this committee their view.

0840

Once again: Second reading of the bill was finished on Thursday. Is that, in your view, a reasonable period of time for people to examine the bill and make a thoughtful presentation to committee, at 8 a.m. on the following day?

Mr. Greg Vezina: From personal experience, to reply to the honourable member, I found out about this Friday morning. By 3 o'clock in the afternoon, I'd been advised that I was going to appear. I had to spend my time on the weekend—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Hillier, and thanks to you, Mr. Vezina, for your presentation and deputation.

MR. KEITH WETTLAUFER

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): We'll move now to our next presenter, and that's Mr. Wettlaufer, who's coming via teleconference from Campbellville, Ont.

Mr. Wettlaufer, you're there?

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): All right. I invite you to begin. You have five minutes to make your opening address—and then questions by rotation from each party. Please begin now.

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: My main concern with Hydro One is really the delivery charge, which takes up the equivalent of 85% of my power usage, which basically doubles my bill. I try to conserve. I live on a farm, so I do use more power than my neighbours. I got a letter from Hydro One stating that I use 55% more hydro than my neighbours; that is because I live on a farm. I'm in a rural area. I'm right in the middle of Hamilton and Guelph. Actually, it's the distribution charges that are making my hydro bill unaffordable. That's really the main point I'd like to get across.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Wettlaufer. You're ready for questions, then?

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): All right. I will begin with the government side: Mr. Bob Delaney, MPP. Please begin—three minutes.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you very much. What part of your delivery charge are you having the issue with, sir?

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: Well, actually, the total, the delivery charges. My hydro usage last month—my most recent bill was \$182; the delivery charge was \$158. So it's close to double my hydro—it's doubling my bill.

Mr. Bob Delaney: What was the reaction of your distributor when you approached them with the issue?

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: I haven't approached my distributor because this is government policy, really.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Okay. From which electrical entity do you get your power bill?

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: Hydro One.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Okay. Could I suggest, then, that you begin your discussion with the entity that sells you the electricity, which is Hydro One? It's hard to react to the comment, as we don't know what explanation Hydro One would give you.

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: I can do that. I think it would be a futile attempt, but I can do that.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you, Chair. I don't think the government has any further questions.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): We'll now move to the PC side: Mr. John Yakabuski, MPP—three minutes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Mr. Wettlaufer, for joining us via teleconference this morning.

I just wanted to clarify: Was your total bill the \$182 and your delivery \$158, or was your electricity usage \$182 and your delivery \$158?

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: Yes. My electrical usage was \$182 and my delivery was \$158.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Okay. So are you telling me, then, that you're happy with the 8% rebate, that this is going to make any significant difference in your bill?

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: Not really. That'll make a \$20 difference.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Much less than a dollar a day.

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: Yes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: What do you think the government could have done to help people in a situation like yourself?

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: I'd like to see the delivery charge eliminated or else greatly reduced. Other provinces don't have it. I'm halfway between Hamilton and Guelph; I'm not way up in northern Ontario, so I don't understand why my delivery charge is that high.

Mr. John Yakabuski: What density is listed on your bill?

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: Low density.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Low density. So you're getting every possible rebate you could get for distribution and you still have a distribution charge that is just slightly less than your actual usage.

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: Yes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Okay. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Wettlaufer. We've certainly indicated our concerns to the government on their energy policies and the increases that have—you know, if they didn't have a delivery charge, it would be melded in your bill some other way and you wouldn't be able to tell, but this way you can see just how much delivery is costing you: somewhere between Hamilton and Guelph, \$158 a month on average. Was this your most recent bill or is that an average?

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: No, this is my most recent bill.

Mr. John Yakabuski: And would that be—

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: It does work out—I've checked other bills and it works out to 85% of my actual usage.

Mr. John Yakabuski: So your delivery is equal to about 85% of your usage on pretty much every bill.

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: Yes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Wettlaufer. We appreciate your speaking to the committee this morning.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Yakabuski.

The floor now goes to Mr. Peter Tabuns of the NDP: three minutes.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Mr. Wettlaufer, thank you for joining us this morning. Can I just ask, have you seen a significant increase in the delivery charge in the last year to three years?

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: I haven't checked for three years. I checked for a year ago and it seems about the same. Three years I haven't checked yet, but I believe it has, because my hydro usage is going down but my bills

are getting higher. I also started answering a survey from Hydro One sent out specifically on delivery charges, but the questions were loaded for me to say, “Yes, I would pay more in delivery charges,” so I didn’t end up completing it.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, I think you were probably wise not to complete it. I can well imagine the questions were totally loaded.

Have you been in business long enough that there was a time when you got a bill that didn’t have the delivery charges separate?

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: Yes.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: And you were aware at that time that the delivery charge was included in the cost of your power?

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: No, I wasn’t.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay. I don’t have further questions. I appreciate your taking the time. I think you reflect a frustration that people all over Ontario are feeling. Thank you.

Mr. Keith Wettlaufer: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Tabuns, and thanks to you, Mr. Wettlaufer, for joining us via teleconference from Campbellville, Ontario.

MS. NORMA SCHMIDT

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Our next presenter is Ms. Norma Schmidt. I invite you to please be seated. You’ve seen the protocol: five minutes for an opening address and three minutes of questions in rotation. I invite you to please begin now.

Ms. Norma Schmidt: Good morning, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. My name is Norma Schmidt. I live in rural Ontario, on the shores of Lake Huron. I am a 60-year-old retired nurse, and have had my life turned upside down by this irresponsible Liberal government. It would take too long to tell my story. Suffice it to say, it has been accomplished in a way that has caused havoc to my life.

Soaring power rates are detrimental to the economy of Ontario. More importantly, it is making the poor poorer. The poor are the most vulnerable in our society and have the least resources with which to adapt. I doubt very much if any of you here on this committee require either you or your family to go to bed hungry at night, or to have to decide whether to pay rent, hydro bill or buy groceries.

The Liberal government’s policies related to energy, and particularly the Green Energy Act, are devastating not only for the poor, but for the economy and the environment, and are noxious to the lives of those who live in rural Ontario.

The Auditor General this year reported that Ontarians paid \$37 billion above market price for electricity. The so-called 8% rebate is a sham and, I believe, a seat-saver for the Liberal government.

A government should also have a global perspective and care for their fellow man. Three billion people lack access to cheap and plentiful energy, perpetuating their

poverty. If concerned citizens of Ontario cannot afford to heat their own homes or eat sufficiently, how can they share their meagre income with the poor of the world?

By focusing on the government’s so-called “green energy”—which in point of fact is not green, as observed by the Ontario Society of Professional Engineers—they are doing a gross disservice to their citizens and the citizens of the world. This leaves three out of every four people in darkness and in poverty in the under-developed world.

I wish the members of this government would wake up to the fact that the GEA is not a solution to Ontario’s problems, but rather an unnecessary demolition of the fabric of our society. The government abolished the 10% green energy benefit and is now introducing an 8% reduction. It is playing a shell game with people’s lives.

The MPP Lou Rinaldi observed that 60% of people will not see any changes to their electricity costs.

0850

If this government was serious about reducing energy prices, they would stop signing contracts for green energy projects, cancel existing wind and solar contracts, and stop selling Ontario’s assets, such as Ontario Hydro. The Auditor General reported that the electricity component of energy bills rose by 70% from 2006 to 2014 and that it will cost consumers another \$133 billion extra over the next 17 years.

Rural Ontario, despite overwhelmingly declaring themselves unwilling hosts to industrial wind turbine complexes, have not only had control over what can be placed in their municipalities removed through the Green Energy Act, but individuals have been forced to suffer ill health, abandonment of homes and disruptions to their way of life. Have you any idea how this feels—to lose one’s health, one’s home and one’s career? Let me tell you, I have, and I’m mad as hell. The cavalier way with which I’ve been treated by this government is shameful.

Urban centres have not felt the same impacts of the GEA, but they are now getting a taste of it with high energy rates. People are forced to buy more expensive, less reliable electricity, and it hurts.

Our government is needlessly paying billions of dollars to subsidize the costs for green energy providers, who profit from the arrangement, at the cost of our public programs. For example: A number of cardiac rehabilitation centres were shut down, requiring doctors and the public to fund new ones. Too many nurses are receiving pink slips, despite the fact that seriously ill patients are lying on gurneys in hallways. There are insufficient rural long-term-care beds for the old and the sick. Hospital beds are reduced—the list goes on and on. Does the Liberal Party get that Ontarians are suffering?

Social and political leadership is required in the province of Ontario and across Canada. I’m outraged beyond belief at the disdain with which this government treats me and the people like me who are struggling to live on a pension in poor health.

As for Bill 13, the Ontario Rebate for Electricity Consumers Act, 2016, it would be a joke if it weren’t such a slap in the face to Ontarians. I will leave you—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Ms. Schmidt, for your opening remarks.

I invite the PC Party to please come forward. Mr. Hillier?

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you, Norma. Just for the record, for that last part, I think the microphone was turned off, so let me read what you said as well:

“I will leave you with this question. Does this government think that we are so stupid that we do not understand what this bill is really about—i.e., losing by-elections?”

“Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and the committee for your time and consideration.”

I want to thank you for being here and being passionate about what is happening. I think your comments are spot-on with many others’ in rural Ontario. You’re certainly not the only person who is feeling this.

You’re living on Lake Huron. I want to just ask about your delivery rates on your bill. Do you—

Ms. Norma Schmidt: Horrendous; absolutely horrendous.

Mr. Randy Hillier: And a substantial portion of your bill?

Ms. Norma Schmidt: Huge. It’s so sickening. I’m 60 years old, my husband is 67, and we’re living on a pension. We’ve never had to budget for food before. We now have to budget at this stage in our life.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Do you have windmills and solar farms?

Ms. Norma Schmidt: I’m surrounded by 115 wind turbines. They caused untold health problems, and I’ve had to leave my home—five years now, I’ve left my home.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Do you see the contradiction that the delivery rates are very high for this renewable green energy where you are and not in urban areas, but the windmills are situated right beside you?

Ms. Norma Schmidt: We’re suffering all the negative consequences of—

Mr. Randy Hillier: —all the negatives, and you’re paying a higher delivery rate, even though the windmills are situated right beside you.

Ms. Norma Schmidt: I feel like I’m Alice in Wonderland. I didn’t think that Canada would allow this to happen. I thought this was a democratic country; it’s not.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you very much.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Hillier.

To Mr. Tabuns.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Ms. Schmidt, thank you very much for coming and presenting here today. I don’t have questions. I think you presented your case very strongly and very ably. Thank you.

Ms. Norma Schmidt: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Tabuns.

To the government side: Mr. Delaney.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you for coming to present to us today. I just have two very brief questions.

How many kilowatt hours per month does your home consume?

Ms. Norma Schmidt: I didn’t bring a bill with me; I’m sorry. I’ve been suffering ill health since these wind turbines came in. I can barely do my activities of daily living. I certainly know I’m paying a lot more than I’ve ever paid before.

Mr. Bob Delaney: In square feet, how big is the home that you live in?

Ms. Norma Schmidt: The home I live in is different from my home. My home, I’m unable to live in because of industrial wind turbines. It has been sitting vacant for five years. I’m now living with my daughter because I don’t have a home to live in. My daughter’s home is approximately 3,000 square feet.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you very much, Chair. We have no further questions.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Delaney, and thanks to Ms. Schmidt for your deputation and your presence today.

MS. MARILYN GOVIER

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): We’ll move now to our next presenter, who is Marilyn Govier, coming to us via teleconference.

Ms. Govier, are you there?

Five-minute recess, colleagues.

The committee recessed from 0856 to 0903.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, colleagues. We’ll reconvene. We have Ms. Marilyn Govier by teleconference from Seaforth, Ontario. Ms. Govier, are you there?

Ms. Marilyn Govier: Yes.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you. You’ll have five minutes to make your opening address, followed by, in rotation, questions from each party. I’d invite you to please begin now.

Ms. Marilyn Govier: Thank you. Hi. My name is Marilyn Govier, as you know. I have confirmed with our hydro—my provider is Festival Hydro, based out of Stratford, Ontario—some extremely high bills, that I consider extremely high.

My biggest concern is not necessarily—well, it is rates, but the delivery charge is my biggest concern. I went over four years’ worth of bills. I’m going to take the same months each year. I’ve got one bill; my delivery fee is 85% of my usage, which was actually one of my lower-usage months. Another one is 60.8%. My other one here: 41.6%. There doesn’t seem to be a consistency. The less hydro I use, the more I get charged. That was the case over the winter. From newsfeeds, I guess, our consumption in Ontario was down over the winter due to a rather mild winter, compared to past years, this past winter. Increases come in after that because we didn’t use enough. So it’s a never-ending battle.

I work my butt off. I go to work every day. I haven’t had holidays in 10 years because I don’t take time off because I need to keep the money coming in. I am a

single mom. My son is now 17, my daughter 23, out working, graduated college. I work my butt off trying to keep my son in sports, baseball, hockey—big on the hockey, very expensive for hockey considering he is a goalie. No discounts for goalies. I work hard to keep my son busy, to keep him off the streets.

I find there are a lot of parents that have a hard time meeting bills. They have to take on second jobs. They have to work not necessarily a job that they care to work in and it's going to inflict on hours where they should be home with their children maybe. Those children are left alone. They're turning to the streets. They're getting involved in bad stuff, as in drugs, crime. Children are hurting nowadays because their parents can't—"Do I buy them a quality winter coat or do I pay the hydro bill so they have heat in the house?" Should it be electric or should it be running gas? You still have to run your furnace off of electricity. To me, it's spiralling out of control. It's turning into a snowball effect, which is affecting the future of our children, making it very difficult on us as parents now or adults.

It's harder to find savings or to be able to save money. It's just a real concern to me. I have an atrocious bill just recently, not a problem of rates—well, I guess it does affect it—but consumption. A bill tripled in one month due to consumption and yet nothing had changed over the previous years, over the previous heat of the summer. One air conditioner in one bedroom, where the door was closed all the time to keep that room cool—the rest of the house was sweltering hot. The apartment I've lived in for the last 10 years: I have not had heat on in my bedroom in four years over the winter because I don't want to pay for the heat cost. And I'm thinking: "Why am I doing this? This is crazy." But I don't spend a lot of time in that room. I go to bed, I put on a couple of extra blankets and I get through it.

I hate to think what other people are going through that can't afford it. Their kids are not having heat in their rooms. You're making a decision between sending your kid to a friend's birthday party, to send them with a gift, or don't send them because you can't afford a gift, because you're spending so much money putting it out to paying your bills, hydro being one of the huge ones that we have. It's truly getting to be a real concern about the future of our kids when parents can't be there for their kids because they've got to work so much, work extra jobs, to be able to afford comforts—like, light comfort, not even vacations—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Ms. Govier; your five minutes' introductory remarks are now past. We now invite Mr. Peter Tabuns of the NDP to begin three minutes of questioning.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Ms. Govier, thank you very much for joining us this morning.

Ms. Marilyn Govier: Thank you.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: With your bill, your delivery charge is almost as much as your energy charge?

Ms. Marilyn Govier: The one bill that I had this summer: Consumption was \$225.11; delivery charge was

\$93.42. A previous one, the really high one, my consumption—or my usage, was \$44.18 and my delivery was \$37.64.

0910

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay.

Ms. Marilyn Govier: The consistency is all over the board.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Right. Would you support blending the delivery charge back into the energy charge? Before privatization started in Ontario, it was all blended into one price, and they're now separate. Would you support putting them back together again?

Ms. Marilyn Govier: If it brings the bill down. Let's put it that way.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: So you don't care what the bill looks like as long as it's lower?

Ms. Marilyn Govier: Well—

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I don't think that's a bad thing; I just want to be clear.

Ms. Marilyn Govier: In the end, that's ultimately where it really, truly needs to go. The energy cost needs to come down.

The client needs to control their energy usage; I agree 100%. My son goes off to school; I go in and make sure his air conditioner, his fan—whatever—is shut off because it's on-peak hours during the day. So we don't have that stuff running.

I do believe that the customer needs to control it. But the way I see it, I try to control it by bringing my energy consumption down and yet the delivery fee goes up. So am I winning? No, I'm not winning because the fees are going up. I changed every light in my house to the new Energy Star energy-saver bulbs—and they're not cheap—and my bill went up. I'm like, "What am I doing wrong?" So I'm extremely confused.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I don't think you're doing anything wrong. If you hadn't taken the measures you've taken, the bill would probably be higher. But the problem is that a large part of it is located outside your house, not inside your house.

Ms. Marilyn Govier: True.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: I thank you very much for your presentation this morning. I'll yield the floor to the Chair.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Tabuns.

To the government side: Mr. Delaney.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Good morning, and thank you very much for your deputation this morning. I happen to be a goaltender too, so I get some of the things you're talking about.

What fuel heats your home?

Ms. Marilyn Govier: Up until August 1, I had electric heat. I moved on August 1 because I cannot go through another winter of bills that are \$450 for heating my house with two of us in it, that are not home all day long because we are at school or at work.

Mr. Bob Delaney: So your home right now is heated by natural gas?

Ms. Marilyn Govier: Yes, it is—which I have not turned on yet.

Mr. Bob Delaney: How big is the home that you live in?

Ms. Marilyn Govier: That I live in right now?

Mr. Bob Delaney: Yes.

Ms. Marilyn Govier: It's a two-storey, with two bedrooms upstairs, and a bathroom. The bedrooms are 9 by 10; they're not very large.

Mr. Bob Delaney: So 2,000 to 2,500 square feet?

Ms. Marilyn Govier: Yes. It's a home that was made into two different apartments, I guess you could say, or units.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Which is the local distribution company that you deal with? In other words, which entity sends you the bill?

Ms. Marilyn Govier: Festival Hydro.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Okay. Where you live now, would you call it within the city, or is it outside the city?

Ms. Marilyn Govier: It's outside the city of Stratford.

Mr. Bob Delaney: All right. Have you qualified for the Ontario Trillium Benefit that would rebate you your sales tax and some of your energy costs on a monthly basis?

Ms. Marilyn Govier: No. I called, and I do not qualify.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Have you asked about the Ontario Electricity Support Program to help you reduce costs?

Ms. Marilyn Govier: I have, and I do not qualify.

Mr. Bob Delaney: What time of day do you use some of the electricity-intensive applications such as, for example—I don't know whether you have a dishwasher, but a dryer?

Ms. Marilyn Govier: I don't have a dishwasher. My washer-dryer: I do laundry after seven or on weekends. I don't do it before that. I turn on the TV at 6 o'clock to catch the news, as a rule. My son doesn't even turn on his TV. He hasn't played 10 hours' worth of Xbox in a whole year. He hasn't watched 10 hours' worth of TV in a whole year. He used to, faithfully. But he doesn't even turn those on anymore. Living room lamps: I've unplugged them. I sit in the dark most of the time with the screen of my computer, if I'm on my computer at night.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Remind your son to keep his stick on the ice and keep an eye on the shooters.

Ms. Marilyn Govier: He lives for hockey.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you, Chair. Those are all of our questions.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): To the PC side: Mr. Yakabuski.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you, Marilyn, for joining us this morning. Your story is not uncommon. So you moved this past summer?

Ms. Marilyn Govier: I did.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Would it be fair to say that the reason you moved, quite frankly, was not because you wanted to move or you didn't like the apartment or building you were in—house, whatever—but you moved because of energy costs?

Ms. Marilyn Govier: One hundred per cent.

Mr. John Yakabuski: One hundred per cent. You've talked about all of the things you've done to move your usage to off-peak times, changing your habits, sacrificing significantly, turning heat off in bedrooms.

Of all of the other household expenses that you have built into your household, have any of them risen anywhere even near, over the last few years, what hydro did? I'm speaking specifically about before you moved, because your electricity usage has dropped since you moved, because your heating source has changed. Is there anything that even comes close to the increases of your hydro bill?

Ms. Marilyn Govier: Not for what I pay out on a monthly basis. No. As far as increases, no. Everything has been relatively the same. The only other thing that I would say maybe that increased was the cellphone providers. I've dropped my home phone because my son and I both have cellphones. So I pay for his as well. You've got to pay for your data.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Right. The amount of things you do with a cellphone has changed dramatically too.

Ms. Marilyn Govier: Oh, definitely.

Mr. John Yakabuski: But I'm thinking more of your rent, of gas bills, of food bills, everything. Has anything changed as dramatically as your electricity bill?

Ms. Marilyn Govier: Not even close.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Not even close. Thank you very much, Marilyn. Do you think that this 8% rebate, which is part of this new bill, is going to change life in any significant way for anybody across the province of Ontario after all of these increases?

Ms. Marilyn Govier: No. No, 8%, unfortunately not. It saves us a little bit, but the delivery fee is atrocious.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Right. You're not going to turn down 8%, but it's not going to have any significant impact on you or anybody else.

Ms. Marilyn Govier: I don't think so, because the rates keep going up. It's being defeated.

Mr. John Yakabuski: They're probably going up again this November. Watch for that.

Ms. Marilyn Govier: Yes. It's being defeated.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Marilyn. We appreciate your input into this committee hearing.

Ms. Marilyn Govier: I thank you for the opportunity.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Yakabuski, and thanks to you, Ms. Govier, for coming to us by teleconference.

MS. ARLINE SMITH

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): We're now going to locate our next presenter, who is also coming via teleconference, from Brussels—not Belgium, but Ontario. Oh, sorry, Port Hope.

She's here? Okay. Thank you, colleagues. We have Ms. Arline Smith.

Ms. Smith, you're there?

Ms. Arline Smith: Yes, I'm here.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): That's great. I invite you to please make your five-minute opening address, followed by questions in rotation by each party. Please begin now.

Ms. Arline Smith: Before I do begin, I have another presentation from a person who lives in the next town and who is very concerned about the hydro. Would I be able to present those? They're both fairly short.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): You have five minutes, period.

Ms. Arline Smith: Okay. Good morning, everybody. I've got two presentations, as I've just said.

My presentation begins: Canadians are being exhorted to save money, which has the effect of reducing the profit margin of hydro companies. Many Ontarians are being forced to live on fixed or limited incomes. In such instances, saving energy has less to do with being green and more to do with finances. Consequently, automatic hydro increases adversely affect the poorest Ontarians. Necessity forces conservation, but the financially challenged cannot control their budgets when there is little protection against automatic increases. To be sure, there is a program to assess low-income Ontarians, but this help is diluted when electricity rates increase, arbitrarily or otherwise.

0920

Where is it mandated that these companies have a guaranteed profit margin? Profit is profit, not loss. Ontarians are caught in a Catch-22 situation: The more they save, the more they pay. We should not be subsidizing energy monopolies or their investors.

In conclusion, the root causes of hydro price increases must be investigated. For example, are the salaries being paid to employees outlandish or are the calculations, rather, switch and bait? I'm not an accountant so I don't know that. But I trust my government to be vigilant in this respect. Ontarians are confused by the message being sent from the provincial government, which is, "Be green or be broke."

That's the end of my presentation. I'll start on Mr. Dillon's and then you can stop me when I run out of time.

Mr. Dillon states that the average cost of hydro increase is 8% to 10% annually. The same day the 8% reduction takes effect, so does a 4% per-litre increase in gasoline at the pumps. Global adjustment is a tax that is supposed to pay for the cost of energy contracts. It is the tax that concerns him. This is not for the cost of electricity. This is a tax to help pay for Ontario's debts. While it is electricity debts, these debts are those of all Ontario taxpayers.

The issue herein is that taxpayers are paying the full tax while it is clearly a tax applicable to all taxpaying Ontarians. In other words, the cost of energy contracts should be paid by taxpayers, not ratepayers.

How they calculate the global adjustment is exceptionally troubling. The adjustment is calculated at an estimated rate of 150% of the cost of electricity. For

example, a family of six—two adults and four children—who use \$20 of electricity per person, for a total electricity cost of \$120, are taxed at a rate of 140% of \$120, for a global adjustment amount of \$168. Not only is this an incredibly high rate of tax, but this tax is applied to electricity used by non-taxpayers, who are children.

Two matters: the Ontario government taxing ratepayers instead of taxpayers, and the Ontario government taxing children at a rate of 140% of the cost of electricity that is used by the family.

In short, ratepayers should not be shouldering the burden of the bad contracts made by the Ontario government. Government debts are the responsibility of taxpayers. Children are not taxpayers and therefore should not be taxed for the electricity they use.

HST is being removed from the bill, but make no mistake; global adjustment is the real tax. It is unconstitutional to tax children and it is unconstitutional to tax ratepayers for debts belonging to the provincial government.

End of statement.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Ms. Smith.

We'll now offer the floor to the Liberal side, to Mr. Delaney.

Ms. Arline Smith: Hello.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you very much. What's the closest major city or town to where you live?

Ms. Arline Smith: There's Peterborough, which is about half an hour or 40 minutes away, and Toronto, which, on a good day, we can get into in about six hours. I'm joking. We're about 100 kilometres east of Toronto on the 401.

Mr. Bob Delaney: That sounds like my commute into Queen's Park.

Ms. Arline Smith: Well, exactly.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Which is the local distribution company that sends you your electricity bill?

Ms. Arline Smith: Veridian Connections.

Mr. Bob Delaney: How big a home do you have in square feet; do you know?

Ms. Arline Smith: It's about 1,800 square feet.

Mr. Bob Delaney: For heating, do you use natural gas?

Ms. Arline Smith: I use natural gas, yes.

Mr. Bob Delaney: How many kilowatt hours per month or per billing period do you consume?

Ms. Arline Smith: Roughly around 1,300.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Is your bill every month or every other month?

Ms. Arline Smith: It's every other month, but now they've just started—they're going to give it to us every month.

Mr. Bob Delaney: So the 1,300 is a two-month period?

Ms. Arline Smith: For two months, yes.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Okay. Thank you, Chair; those are all the questions that we have.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Delaney.

We'll now move to the PC side: Mr. Yakabuski, three minutes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Ms. Smith, for joining us today and making your two presentations.

I just wanted to talk about the global adjustment for a moment. You might recall a time when they didn't call it the "global adjustment"; they called it the "provincial benefit." At that time, it usually turned out to be a provincial benefit for anyone who was receiving a notation of it on their electricity bill. Essentially, it is the cost of contracts and programs that the government delivers and then charges back to the energy users. You've spoken very eloquently about the effect of it on your bill.

You made two presentations today—one by yourself and one on behalf of someone else—so I would hazard a guess that electricity is a topic that is talked about fairly often among you and your friends and neighbours. Is there any subject that has caused people in your circle of friends more frustration than the rapid increases in the cost of electricity here in the province of Ontario over the last few years?

Ms. Arline Smith: I would hazard a guess that local taxes—the tax that we pay every year on our property—are exorbitant here. People are very stretched. Also, this town is a town of aging people and of people moving here from Toronto who are retirees. One would assume that a lot of them are on restricted incomes.

I started writing last November to Kathleen Wynne, when the November increase was automatically given. I was just steamed. I'm bending over backwards, turning off lights. I've insulated my house to within an inch of its life to be green and, consequently, save energy—or save energy and, consequently, be green. What I hear from people is that they can't keep ahead of the game. It doesn't matter how hard they try; they keep being hit from left, right and centre.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You briefly mentioned taxes, but only briefly. But I'm reading between the lines that there is no issue that frustrates people more than energy. Am I correct?

Ms. Arline Smith: Absolutely. They feel helpless because they see that there is an automatic increase. There doesn't seem to be anybody looking through the books to see if it's deserved. In our perceptions, I perceive that the profit margins are being maintained by the government simply because the more we save—if you're asking us to be green and save energy, it automatically translates to a loss in profit for the hydro companies.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Even last year, when we had a mild winter, your hydro bills went up—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Yakabuski.

To the NDP: Mr. Tabuns.

Ms. Arline Smith: Absolutely; if I did not get the help from the Ontario government—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Mr. Tabuns has the floor.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: No, I'll let her complete.

Ms. Arline Smith:—that I require, I don't think that I could afford my electricity bill. It would be nearly \$100 more than it is now.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Ms. Smith.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Ms. Smith, thank you very much for your presentation today. I don't have any questions to add. I think that you have been very thorough.

Ms. Arline Smith: All right, my dear. Well, please keep—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you very much, Ms. Smith, for your deputation and for coming to us via teleconference.

MS. MARGUERITE THOMAS

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): We now pause to connect to our next presenter from Brussels—not Belgium, but Ontario: Marguerite Thomas.

Ms. Thomas, are you there?

Ms. Marguerite Thomas: I'm here, thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you very much. I think that all of us would like to know where Brussels, Ontario—at least, I don't know. You have five minutes in which to make your introductory remarks, followed by questions in rotation. Please begin now.

Ms. Marguerite Thomas: I would like to thank the Chair and committee members for the time and privilege of sharing my experiences. I am a senior and I have been a registered nurse since 1977. I am still working part-time, even though I am over 70.

I also sit on a variety of committees and panels and I am familiar with the circumstances of other seniors and families in rural southwestern Ontario. I follow the news and I am aware that many rural and northern Ontario hydro customers have been unable to pay their bills and have been cut off.

0930

There are four reasons why rural and northern Ontario hydro customers need to have more reasonable charges for their energy:

(1) The rates are too high and the delivery charges are truly a hardship.

(2) People who fall behind often rely upon agencies like the United Way or the compassionate and benevolent funds of ministerial associations. These agencies fund-raise for donations and there is something very, very wrong with Ontario Hydro CEOs and executives benefitting from these charitable donations.

(3) Rural Ontario feeds cities, but high energy costs have caused families to lose businesses and farms. Energy poverty is very real, whereby people have to decide whether to heat or to eat. We need our farms for local food. Buying local is true conservation for the environment and a great way to fight climate change. It is not just a token. It is real green energy. We also need the businesses and the surrounding communities to service the farms and the farmers.

(4) I sit on the local age-friendly communities committee. A basic tenet of a community being friendly for all ages is being able to afford to live there. Hydro rates have made our rural and northern communities quite the opposite.

I do not need to tell you that there has been a groundswell of anger over the high bills that we are receiving. Headlines literally scream with the impotent rage that people are feeling in 2016. It is difficult to understand why Ontario Hydro does not address the root causes of their problems. Instead, they participate in a victim-blaming attitude that if only we had the right appliance or bought the right light bulb, our bills would miraculously become affordable.

During the recent by-election in Toronto, the media suggested that high energy bills were part of the reason the Liberals lost. They showed a Toronto Hydro bill with a \$47 delivery charge. Here, in rural areas, we can only dream about delivery charges as low as \$47. During January and February of this year, I was charged close to \$500, with the delivery charges being \$160 and \$178.

Who can comfortably afford that other than the very wealthy? The cut-off for assistance for low-income earners is way too low and the amount they would be credited is way too small to be meaningful.

My last bill was \$183 for 630 kilowatt hours for the month of August. I have a small house with a gas stove, gas water heater, barbecue and generator. My actual consumption was \$71. That is high enough considering how little I really use, but it would have been affordable. However, on top of that, the delivery charge, the regulatory charge and the HST added an extra \$112 to my \$71 usage. There is no way that a fancy light bulb or two is going to cure that extra \$112.

I looked at my older hydro bills. I was charged twice as much last month as I was charged in 2010. How can Ontario Hydro charge you over 100% more and then think you should smile and be happy that you get 8% back? How many rural and northern workers have had a 100% increase in their wages since 2010? If all our household operating bills increased by 100% and we got an 8% rebate, would we rejoice, or would we weep at the injustice? An 8% rebate last month would have saved a mere \$13 on the bill, charging me \$170 instead of \$183. That is not very impressive.

Furthermore, that 8% is going to disappear when the November 1 rate increases are added, and then the infamous tax on the tax when cap-and-trade becomes effective. There is no joy in rural and northern households; indeed, there is depression and mental health issues.

If this government is serious about making Ontario a place where rural and northern people can thrive and—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Ms. Thomas, I'll need to intervene there. The five minutes are expired.

I invite the PC side—Mr. Hillier.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Thank you very much, Marguerite, for being with the committee this morning.

Just to reiterate: You said that since 2010 your total hydro bill has more than doubled in that period of time?

Ms. Marguerite Thomas: Yes, when I compare—I did a lot of comparison but I knew it would take too much time, but for the same amount of hydro that I use, the rate is doubled.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Right. And I heard your last bill was \$76 for electricity use and \$112 in other charges, including the delivery charge.

Ms. Marguerite Thomas: Seventy-one dollars for the usage.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Seventy-one. Okay.

Ms. Marguerite Thomas: By the way, Brussels is about an hour and a half north of London.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Right. I think you also said that your electricity consumption was only 630 kilowatt hours for the month. You're doing your part on conservation. That's substantially below the average residential consumer's use.

Ms. Marguerite Thomas: They sent me a notice and said exactly that.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Oh. So you got one of those notices as well, that you should have a smiley face because you're using less power.

Ms. Marguerite Thomas: Exactly.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Right. Marguerite, on the delivery rates, are you aware that Ontario is the only province that has a delivery rate in any jurisdiction in this country?

Ms. Marguerite Thomas: I was not aware of that, but I have been looking at a lot of the media reports, and I have to say, most of the comparisons are made in cities. There's very little rural comparison.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Okay. Are you also aware of the great difference in delivery rates between densely populated urban areas and sparsely populated rural areas?

Ms. Marguerite Thomas: I am very aware of that. I live on the edge of a village of 1,000 people and the people deeper in the village pay less of a delivery rate than I do.

Mr. Randy Hillier: Have you applied for the LEAP program or any other programs for rate relief from Ontario Hydro?

Ms. Marguerite Thomas: No, because I earn too much money. I've been working as a nurse. I scrimped and saved throughout my working years, so I kept some money for my golden years. I really didn't plan to donate it to Ontario Hydro.

Mr. Randy Hillier: So even though you're in this position, you don't qualify for any rate relief from Ontario Hydro or Hydro One?

Ms. Marguerite Thomas: No, in my statement that the rate relief—the cut-off is way too low and the amount that people get back is way too low. I talk with people in my community and, to a person, they are just beside themselves with rage and sadness at how much of their—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Hillier.

We'll now move you, Ms. Thomas, to the NDP. Mr. Tabuns.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you for joining us this morning, Ms. Thomas. I think you've made your case very clearly. I don't have any questions. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Ms. Thomas, I move you now to the government side. Mr. Delaney.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you very much. I'm not sure if you said what local distribution company sends you your bill.

Ms. Marguerite Thomas: Ontario Hydro.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Ontario Hydro?

Ms. Marguerite Thomas: Yes.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Ontario Hydro?

Ms. Marguerite Thomas: Hydro One.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Okay, Hydro One. You mentioned you would call yourself a rural rather than an urban dweller, right?

Ms. Marguerite Thomas: Yes. I live on the edge of a village.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Have you talked to Hydro One regarding some of the rate mitigation programs that are available for people, depending upon their income threshold?

Ms. Marguerite Thomas: I don't need to do that because I have the chart of what the income is, and as I've stated, you have to have really minimal income. It doesn't help people who scrimped and saved for their golden years so they could have a bit of money.

Mr. Bob Delaney: What fuel do you use to heat your home?

Ms. Marguerite Thomas: I have a heat pump.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Okay. So, in other words, you'll use your heat pump to heat the home using electricity. Do you have another fuel that you use in the wintertime when heat pumps become less efficient?

Ms. Marguerite Thomas: I actually have a gas generator that I can use if the hydro goes off, and I am in the process of getting a gas fireplace.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Are you connected to a natural gas company, Enbridge—

Ms. Marguerite Thomas: No, propane.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Propane. All right. Thank you, Chair. Those are all the questions that we have.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Delaney.

Thanks to you, Ms. Thomas, for your deputation from Brussels, Ontario.

Colleagues, we're now in recess till 4 p.m. today.

The committee recessed from 0939 to 1600.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, colleagues. I reconvene the Standing Committee on Justice Policy. As you know, we're considering Bill 13, An Act in respect of the cost of electricity. We've had a number of presenters earlier, and we have a number to follow now.

MR. TERRANCE GREEN

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Our first presenter comes to us via teleconference: Mr. Terrance Green. Are you there, Mr. Green?

Mr. Terrance Green: I am here, yes.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Great. You have five minutes in which to make your opening address, and then we will have questioning by rotation to each party. I'd invite you to please begin now.

Mr. Terrance Green: Thank you. On behalf of my wife, Lorraine, and myself, I want to thank you for the opportunity to speak to the committee. We have spent a lot of time in trying to get our electrical bill down and keep it under control, and dealing with the smart meter that has now been installed. We've been able to keep it down that we're well within the low-usage category. We do nothing with electricity during the peak period, and now to find that we are going to be penalized in the distribution grid by Hydro simply because we did what we were asked to do and conserved our electricity and followed the rules that we were given—and now we're going to be charged more for distribution of electricity, while people who use a lot of electricity, are heavy consumers, end up getting a reduction in their distribution rate, which I think is unfair.

I also find that in looking at the electrical rates now compared to what they were when my wife and I moved to Ontario in 1992, they are considerably higher. We've been paying increases continuously. In looking at the papers provided for hydro, I find that now we're going to be paying increased rates for something that was supposed to be repaired several years ago. There was a rate increase put in place several years ago for the replacement of the repeater stations. They didn't do that maintenance, and now Hydro is going back to get another increase solely for replacing the equipment that they got a rate increase for previously. We think something has to be done to get hydro under control and the rates under control.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Green. We'll now invite you to be questioned by our colleagues from the Progressive Conservative Party, beginning with Mr. Yakabuski. Three minutes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Green, for joining us today via teleconference. If there was more notice, would you have been able to attend this in person?

Mr. Terrance Green: If there was more notice, I would have been able to attend in person, but not today. I had a heart attack on July 5. It just so happened I had appointments at the heart institute this morning and actually just got back at 3:30. So I wouldn't have been able to attend today, but another day I would have been able to, and I would have gone to Toronto to present in person.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Right. The 8% rebate that the government has promised in this legislation—you talk to a lot of people and you know what has happened to their hydro bills over the last several years, I would surmise; is that correct?

Mr. Terrance Green: I not only talk to a lot of people, but I've dealt with some clients who are out in rural areas. One client in particular—he hardly uses any electricity, is basically off the grid, and he just got a bill that he dealt with that was over \$10,000.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Wow. So this 8% rebate—

Mr. Terrance Green: It's not much.

Mr. John Yakabuski: —in the big picture, is it going to do anything to mitigate the damage that has been done over the last several years and the pain and suffering that people are going through in rural Ontario with skyrocketing hydro bills, or is this more about window dressing?

Mr. Terrance Green: I think it's more about window dressing. It's 8% they're going to reimburse the—well, actually, they're removing the tax portion for now. There's no guarantee that the tax portion is going to be off forever. Who knows? They could bring it back six months from now if they wanted to.

Mr. John Yakabuski: So basically there are an awful lot of things this government needs to do besides that 8% rebate to correct the mess they've created. Would that be a fair statement?

Mr. Terrance Green: I would consider that a very fair statement.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Can I ask you where you're from, Mr. Green?

Mr. Terrance Green: I'm from Ottawa.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Ottawa. Have you ever spoken to any of the members on the government side from the Ottawa area on these issues?

Mr. Terrance Green: I have spoken to—what's his name?—Fraser, who's the representative here for the Liberal Party, from Ottawa South—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Ottawa South?

Mr. Terrance Green: Yes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Okay. Any indication that there was at least an understanding of what people, particularly in rural Ontario, are going through?

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Yakabuski.

Just before I move you to Mr. Tabuns of the NDP, Mr. Green, I thank you for joining us, having learned you've just had a heart attack. That's very kind of you.

Mr. Tabuns, three minutes.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Mr. Green, again thank you very much for joining us. Mr. Yakabuski had asked you about the impact of these rates on rural Ontario. Would you care to answer that question?

Mr. Terrance Green: I would love to have the opportunity to answer it, and thank you very much for giving it to me.

I will say, in answer to the first question, it is my pleasure to be here and speak out on this. I will tell you, I'm a lawyer by trade. Because I'm at home recuperating from a heart attack—I do get to talk to a lot of people. That comes with the territory: Lawyers like to talk.

I've heard people tell me that their distribution rates in rural communities have gone up considerably. They're paying a lot more now just for distribution, let alone the rate per kilowatt hour. I've heard stories of people who literally have no energy-consuming appliances in their home—no real heavy energy-consuming appliances, like TVs or air conditioners, and their bills have gone up

several hundred dollars over the last year or two. A lot of it seems to be because of the smart meters; a lot of it because Hydro is having a real difficult time trying to, I think, manage the corporation that they have been mandated to manage.

As I said in my original presentation, Hydro is going back to get increases to repair and replace the equipment that they already went to the board and got increases to replace—but never replaced it at that point, and now it's coming to the crucial period of time where they have to replace it. People's rates are going up, and Hydro management is getting worse.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay. Thank you very much for your time. I appreciate your comments.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Tabuns.

Mr. Green, now I'll move you to the government side. Mr. Delaney.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Good afternoon, Mr. Green. I have just a few fairly quick questions for you, just to help understand your particular situation. Do you live near Ottawa or in Ottawa? Would you classify the area that you're living as a urban or rural?

Mr. Terrance Green: I'm in the riding of Ottawa South. I am very much in an urban area.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Okay. Do you live in a single-family home or in a townhouse or an apartment?

Mr. Terrance Green: A single-family home.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Okay. How big is your home, roughly, in square feet?

Mr. Terrance Green: About 1,200 square feet, roughly.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Hydro Ottawa would then bill you, I think, every other month?

Mr. Terrance Green: Let's ask my wife that. She deals with that. Just a second—

Mr. Bob Delaney: Do you know how many kilowatt hours of electricity you would consume in a single billing period?

Mr. Terrance Green: My wife just told me that we get charged every month for hydro.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Okay. What fuel heats your home? Is it electricity or gas?

Mr. Terrance Green: Gas.

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Mr. Bob Delaney: Hydro Ottawa has a number of payment assistance programs. Have you ever looked into any of them?

Mr. Terrance Green: I've looked into some. I don't qualify for them.

Hydro was actually on our property last week, including today, and they'll be back tomorrow to replace the pole in our backyard. My wife was out talking to them as well and got some information about what they're doing and what other programs are there.

We did take advantage of the thermostat that they had to keep costs down by programming it and changing the temperature that would come on in the day versus the evening.

They also came around in terms of the energy-efficient light bulbs, which we got information on. Those are the ones that we buy now. There were a few things that they identified that we are doing and some that my wife is looking into.

Mr. Bob Delaney: A couple of final questions, then: How old are the appliances in your home, particularly the dryer and, if you have one, the dishwasher?

Mr. Terrance Green: Our dryer is gas. It's approximately 10 years old—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Delaney, and thanks to you, Mr. Green, for your deputa- tion coming via teleconference. We wish you all health, and thank you again for your participation.

Mr. Terrance Green: Thank you very much.

CANADIAN FEDERATION OF INDEPENDENT BUSINESS

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): We'll now move to our next presenters, Ms. Kwiecinski and Mr. Mallough of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. Wel- come, colleagues. You've seen the drill. Please join us. You have, as you know, five minutes to make an opening address, and then a rotation of questions afterward.

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: I'm just going to grab some water.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Okay. Kwiecinski.

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: Correct.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Please begin.

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: Dzień dobry. Jak się masz?

And on that note, before I begin, I would like to wish Peter Tabuns a happy birthday. Sto lat, which means, "A hundred years," in Polish—so happy birthday, Peter Tabuns.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you very much.

Mr. Mike Colle: Julie, I didn't recognize you. Is that you?

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: Hi, Mr. Colle. How are you and Mr. Delaney? I better get to the real issues at hand here, but thank you for your recognition on the govern- ment side.

Good afternoon, Chair and MPPs. We appreciate the opportunity to comment today on Bill 13, on behalf of 42,000 Ontario members, who are Ontario's job creators. These hard-working people get hit twice by high hydro bills: first at work and then at home. That's why this bill is very important.

To give you an idea of who we are, we represent about 500,000 employees in virtually all job sectors. While our membership can range from one to 499 employees of both small and medium-sized businesses, our average- sized business is about nine employees. I think that's important to get on the record.

Some other important small business facts: Small and medium-sized businesses employ 87.3% of Ontarians. Ontario has over 400,000 small businesses, and small businesses alone make up 97.9% of all businesses in

Canada. That's huge. We're talking about Ontario's eco- nomic engine here and Ontario's job creators.

Now, obviously, it goes without saying that high hydro costs have a potentially devastating effect on these businesses, including job losses and business closures, just to name a very few examples.

Bill 13: We support the rebate of the 8% provincial portion of the HST on hydro bills as a good start, and we appreciate that this rebate would also apply to small businesses and farmers, not just households. We also appreciate that it's permanent, as any future governments would have to repeal the legislation.

However, we can't ignore the fact that this rebate will likely be more than offset by the October 1 increase in natural gas for heating, the expected hydro rate increases on November 1 and the costs of the government's new carbon tax starting January 1. We appreciate the rebate, but we have to take it in context of other things that are coming down the pipe that we know are going to happen.

The 8% rebate clearly will provide some relief, but it's marginal relief. We hope the government sees this as a foundation for making more substantial moves to immediately cut hydro costs while planning for the future—doing both together. The long-term stuff is great, but you have to remember that you have to do the short- term planning first and provide more relief. Our busi- nesses are suffering. They're drowning in their hydro bills. It doesn't help to plan for the future when you can't even get there, folks.

We've been hearing complaints from CFIB members about skyrocketing hydro rates for the past two years. But we don't want to come here all negative. We know you get a lot of people coming here and complaining. We want to bring you some solutions, and we hope govern- ment is listening because we have some recommenda- tions today.

I'm going to turn you over to Ryan, who's going to highlight some of our key issues as expressed to us directly by our 42,000 members.

Mr. Ryan Mallough: Our members' concerns can be summed up in three specific areas.

The first one is the global adjustment. The global ad- justment accounted for about 77% of usage fees. It appears to be up again this year. Seven of the eight months, compared to last year, have a higher global ad- justment fee. The members feel that it's unfair. It's often hidden; they can't see it on their bills and are surprised when they hear what it is. They're seeing it as a penalty on their conservation efforts. The more the province seems to save, the higher this number seems to go.

The second one is the debt retirement charge. The debt retirement charge was off our residential bills, I believe, as of January 1 of this year. It is still on commercial bills and it is a significant fee for business owners.

Finally, and this is the big one, time-of-use and smart meters: We've seen some success residentially with time- of-use and smart meters, but there has been little impact on changing business habits. It is very difficult for a pizza shop to make pizzas at 3 in the morning. It is very

difficult for a hairdresser to start cutting hair at 4 in the morning. Businesses operate during business hours. Many of our members took a major hit when smart meters were introduced because they operate during peak hours. From our standpoint, time-of-use on a small business is simply a penalty for being open—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you very much, colleagues.

We'll now move it to questions and to Mr. Tabuns of the NDP for your three minutes.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Julie, Ryan, thanks very much for being here.

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: Thank you. It's our pleasure.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Do you have amendments that you feel should be incorporated into this bill? I know, Ryan, you were just talking in a larger sense about the portfolio as a whole, but are there particular amendments for this bill that you propose?

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: What I would phrase them as are recommendations because I'm not sure if they require legislation. But if you don't mind, in answer to your question, I'd like to share them.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Sure. Go ahead.

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: These would be our proposed solutions/recommendations:

You have to deal with the global adjustment. We know it's complex and difficult to understand, but at least start with transparency by showing it on all hydro bills. When people are aware of it, then they really get upset about it and they start to understand and learn about it.

Speed up the removal of the debt retirement charge on commercial hydro bills, which is currently slated to come off on April 1, 2018.

Eliminate time-of-use smart meter rates for small business and implement a lower-cost rate system on the first 3,000 kilowatt hours of energy use per month, which would encourage conservation without penalizing people—which is how the global adjustment works now.

And last but not least, find savings within government to help offset any solutions. Businesses are making hard choices to pay for their hydro, so government should make hard financial choices too. That's what we really want to see. People say this is going to cost this much, or that's going to cost this much. Well, government needs to find these savings.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Out of curiosity, what's the reasoning behind the 3,000-kilowatt-hour threshold?

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: The reasoning is, Peter, because of the Ontario Clean Energy Benefit. That was the threshold. Remember the 10%?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Ah. Okay.

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: That's why it's 3,000 kilowatt hours.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay. So you're basing it on a level that they had already set previously.

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: Exactly. We felt that that was doable. We want to go to government and MPPs with doable solutions. If it worked for the Ontario Clean

Energy Benefit, that threshold, why wouldn't it work for this?

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Right. I understand that logic.

I don't have further questions. I appreciate it. Thank you very much.

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: Thank you. Those were great questions.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Tabuns, and yes, happy birthday.

To the Liberal side: Mr. Delaney.

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Mr. Bob Delaney: It's good to see you again, Julie.

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: Thank you. It's my pleasure to see you, Bob.

Mr. Bob Delaney: First of all, I enjoyed your recommendations and I'm hoping we can continue this type of dialogue, because I thought what you said was very constructive in the long-term energy plan 2017 consideration. I'd really like to pick up some of the threads that you had begun and see whether or not we could go somewhere with them.

Are you planning on participating in the long-term energy plan considerations?

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: Yes, we've actually spoken directly to the minister's office about it, that we would like to participate. Because, again, our approach—while obviously we have to be honest—we are representing our members. I am here today not as Julie Kwiecinski; I am here because our grassroots membership tells me that this is what they want me to say. So it's important for us to approach this very collaboratively and look at solutions. So absolutely, Bob, we will be there with bells on.

Mr. Bob Delaney: The cost driver, which is no secret, in electricity prices everywhere in the world is capital expenditures. You're either spending money renewing your system, or you aren't. If you are and you're a large jurisdiction, you're putting tens of billions of dollars' worth of capital expenditures on to your rate base.

Is your feeling that Ontario local distribution companies, Ontario Power Generation and the other participants—should they stretch out or freeze their capital expenditures and modernization of the system?

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: Well, that sounds like a loaded question. Obviously, we have to make improvements, but what we find with these types of programs that involve a lot of spending is that if we did the spending in stages all the time, we wouldn't be faced—it reminds me of DND procurements. When they replace these helicopters, instead of replacing them in stages, they have to replace them all and it's billions and billions of dollars.

I think that's something that's going to come in the long-term planning. We recognize that it has to be done, but we also have to recognize that businesses can only handle so much, and right now, they're drowning in their hydro bills. So I'm not saying that we stop doing the infrastructure improvements, but we've got to be smart about it, and maybe all levels of government, not just provincial, need to find savings so they're not constantly running to businesses and residents for more money.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Just in sort of general terms, how much of a business's electricity usage should be paid by the user, and how much should be a public subsidy?

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: I don't really have an answer to that, Bob.

Do you have anything to shed on that, Ryan?

Mr. Ryan Mallough: No. I think our concern right now comes in with the global adjustment in terms of—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Delaney.

We move to the PC side. Mr. Yakabuski: three minutes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Ryan and Julie, for joining us today. We appreciate your candour in pointing out just how difficult hydro rates are for your 42,000 members, representing half a million workers in this province. We do appreciate that.

You talked about a couple of things: the global adjustment, the debt retirement charge, the time-of-use. We've raised this so many times about where—Ryan talked about pizzas at 3 in the morning. If you've got a ma-and-pa-run restaurant that caters to the breakfast and lunch crowd in small-town Ontario, they cannot benefit by time-of-use at all. Would that be a fair statement?

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: Well, that's absolutely true, absolutely true. Especially the biggest shock comes when the business switches to the smart meter, because their bill automatically goes up. What is happening right now is that you're being penalized for opening. You turn your key to open the business and you're being penalized. You can't expect a business to change their behaviour. If they're open from 9 to 5, they're not going to change their operating hours.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Customers might come when the customers come, right?

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: Exactly. So the current smart meter system is punitive; that's the best way to describe it. It penalizes people for even opening their door to be open for business. That has got to change. That's one of the top things we hear, and especially the shock when they first get a smart meter bill.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Another thing I wanted to ask you about, because we've heard the minister and the Premier cite it in answers to questions in the last few days: the industrial conservation initiative, where they've lowered the threshold to one megawatt from five megawatts. But in answers to questions, they were saying, "Your small business should look into the ICI program," to members on the opposite side of the House.

Your membership: 42,000 members. How many new ones are going to benefit by this change in the ICI program? It's still, I would suggest, probably way beyond the use of most of your members.

Mr. Ryan Mallough: Very, very few members will benefit from the program. The lowering to one megawatt of demand as the threshold represents an incredibly small part of our membership. There may be a couple of the larger manufacturers and maybe a couple of the larger

greenhouses, but otherwise this is not a program that will apply to the vast majority of our members.

Mr. John Yakabuski: So when the Liberal government puts that out in answer to a question as being somehow part of the solution, really, it's more about talking points than it is about real action.

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: Well, if you're asking us and what we hear from our members, John—

Mr. John Yakabuski: Yes, absolutely.

Ms. Julie Kwiecinski: The truth is, it's based on peak demand, which is a lot different than being based on usage.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thanks to you, Ms. Kwiecinski and Mr. Mallough, for your deputation on behalf of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business.

SEAMLESS AUTO CARE

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): I invite our next presenter to please come forward: Mr. Shawn Greenberg via teleconference. Are you there, Mr. Greenberg?

Mr. Shawn Greenberg: I am here.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you. If you might just try to speak up a little bit, Mr. Greenberg, so that we can hear you properly.

Mr. Shawn Greenberg: How's that?

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you. You have five minutes in which to make an opening address, with rotations of questions of three minutes each afterward. I invite you to please begin now.

Mr. Shawn Greenberg: The person who spoke before me kind of summarized some of my stuff, but let me introduce myself. My two sons and I run an auto repair business in the town of Carleton Place, about 15 minutes west of Ottawa. We opened the business in April 2012. We're open Monday to Friday during normal business hours. Weekends we spend with our families. Our electricity is delivered through Hydro One, which means we're paying more for service than a business, say, in Ottawa. So that's our first penalty.

When we first received our hydro bills back in 2012, we discovered we were on the RPP plan. For the next three and a half years, we thought nothing of it. Having never run a business before and having no commercial dealings with Hydro One, this seemed perfectly normal to us.

Late in 2015, there was a news article that disclosed that some 32,000 customers could not be put on time-of-use because communications from the meter to the mother ship were an issue. Guess what? I was one of them. Considering our hours of operation, this was actually a good thing for us. Then in 2016, we received a letter from Hydro One explaining in an oh-so-proud tone that we were going to be switched over to time-of-use shortly. They touted the benefits of this change so much as it would now allow us to better follow and manage our electricity usage.

If you were to walk into our shop at any given time, you would observe that the majority of electricity goes to lighting and not much more. Yes, we have a few personal computers running, and yes, we have a fridge to keep our lunch fresh, but that's it. Our compressor runs, perhaps, 30 minutes a day, and I'm being generous. Our hoists are on for minutes as we raise and lower cars. We do, however, cool the shop in the summer, and while some might think that that's a luxury that we can do without, you try and work on a searing hot engine in a 30-plus-degree shop and see how sick you'll feel. Our health is important to us and to any future employees, and this is something we will not compromise for any money.

Last summer, 2015, when we went on the RPP, our average bill, with air conditioning, was around \$200 a month before tax. As you can see, we're not a big user. Two years before that, it was actually warmer outside, and our bills in the summer averaged \$250. This year, on time-of-use—and yes, it was hotter, but our bills are hitting \$350 per month. Seeing as how AC is typically turned off at night, the majority of this cost increase can be attributed to time-of-use. That's \$100 more per month to keep us healthy and run our business.

Let me say that this letter we got from Hydro One was the most insulting and condescending thing I have read to date. How the heck am I going to do better to manage my usage? I'm open during peak hours because, as we heard before, that's when customers want to fix their cars. This is not laundry that I can delay and do in the evenings. For us and all small businesses, time-of-use is penalizing us for doing business. To me, we are in fact subsidizing off-peak hours and other poor investments that we've heard about in the news.

Last year, we even applied for the \$1,500 grant to reduce our lighting costs and move from fluorescent to LED lighting. By my estimate, this would have cost us \$900 and saved us about \$50 a month. An inspector came out, got paid to do so, and we were informed right there on the spot that we did not qualify because our fluorescent fixtures were good enough—another slap in the face from the system that encourages us to conserve and use less.

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Here we are presenting our opinions on Bill 13. The government has decided that hydro prices are in crisis and they plan on giving us a rebate of the equivalent of the 8% PST on our bill, after cancelling the 10% rebate we were receiving a year earlier. If I were more excited to get 2% less, I'd pass out. For us, that equates to about \$29 in the summer and less in the winter. At that rate, if I save up for about three months, I can probably buy one Snap-on wrench, if I'm lucky. I can't express my feelings enough on how lacking this rebate is in solving the crisis we are in.

My recommendation for this bill is to scrap it. A better step to saving the province would be to scrap time-of-use and scrap the global adjustment, put us back on RPP and charge us a fair rate based on the real cost of generation, which we all know has dropped over the past several years.

In closing, I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to present today.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Greenberg, for your precision timing.

Now to the government side: Mr. Delaney, three minutes.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you, Mr. Greenberg. I was listening to your presentation, and it sounds to me as if you've looked at the Hydro One website and taken them up on some of their offers to work with businesses of your size and type on energy conservation. Am I correct on that?

Mr. Shawn Greenberg: Correct, and as I said, I was declined because my fixtures are good enough.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Are there any other tools and equipment that you use that you may be able to find assistance in order to upgrade to a newer or more energy-efficient model?

Mr. Shawn Greenberg: No, not at all. As I said, we started our business in 2012. All our equipment is as efficient as possible. Our compressor is a three-phase 220 in order to reduce the load and the consumption. All our hoists are running on 220 to reduce the load. All light fixtures are either fluorescent or on the ceilings; small ones are CFL or LED for small light bulbs. I've gone to the limit I possibly can.

To put it in perspective, I'm only using about 1,500 to 1,700 kilowatt hours a month, which is about what I use at home, but it's costing me twice as much to run my business as it is to run my house for the same amount of electricity. That's because I'm not home during the day; I'm here.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Okay. Thank you very much for your time and for the information today. We've made some notes, and I wish you well.

Mr. Shawn Greenberg: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): We continue to the PC side. Mr. Smith.

Mr. Todd Smith: Thank you, Shawn, for calling in and being a part of this committee process today.

I'm just curious: How many employees do you have at Seamless Auto Care?

Mr. Shawn Greenberg: It's myself and my two sons. They're my licensed techs.

Mr. Todd Smith: So you have three people working there.

Mr. Shawn Greenberg: That's correct.

Mr. Todd Smith: And all in the family.

Mr. Shawn Greenberg: That's right.

Mr. Todd Smith: I hear from businesses all the time who are being faced with the dilemma, because of the soaring electricity prices, of reducing the hours of their employees and that type of thing. Being a family business, are you facing that same type of conundrum?

Mr. Shawn Greenberg: Well, I can't fire my sons; I need them. But, interesting point: We are at the tipping point in our business. Our business is successful. It is growing, and we're at the tipping point now of the discussions of hiring an employee. It's the dilemma of: Can

we afford to do it? There's only so much money that comes in every month, and it has to go someplace, and \$100 a month could pay an employee at least a day.

Mr. Todd Smith: I think you hit the nail on the head when you were talking about the time-of-use metering and the fact that you're paying much more for about the same number of kilowatt hours as you would use at home, but during the day you're working at your auto shop, so you're not using as much power at home. Time-of-use simply isn't working for you when you're trying to run a business. You have to be there when the people need their cars fixed.

Mr. Shawn Greenberg: That's right. I can't fix cars at night. The parts stores aren't even open, so it's a non-starter for our type of business.

Mr. Todd Smith: And you recommended going back to the way it was before the time-of-use metering. Have you done the calculations? Have you figured out what that might mean for your business?

Mr. Shawn Greenberg: I'm expecting it to go back to where it was. As a matter of fact, I have decided to go with an electrical marketer and switch back off of time-of-use and try that and see where we're at. Unfortunately, the process started before the summer and due to Hydro One's slow response, I won't come online until this month. So the exact numbers I couldn't give you, but I'm expecting that next summer I'll save that \$100 a month. But I shouldn't have had to do that.

Mr. Todd Smith: Right. And you've taken some steps to conserve by purchasing new light bulbs. Did I hear you say that and—

Mr. Shawn Greenberg: Well, the four-foot fluorescent fixtures in the ceilings, that was that \$900 I discussed. Those I'm not going to replace because—if I could get the grant to do it, great. If not, that's two years to break even and I'd like to see how this new electrical marketer would be before I drop \$1,000 out of my pocket.

Mr. Todd Smith: Not that it's any consolation for you, Mr. Greenberg, but I've talked to a lot of businesses in Prince Edward-Hastings—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Smith.

I believe we have time now for Mr. Tabuns.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Mr. Greenberg, thank you very much for joining us this afternoon. I don't have any questions for you, but I appreciate your input.

Mr. Shawn Greenberg: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Tabuns, and thanks to you, Mr. Greenberg.

ONTARIO FEDERATION OF AGRICULTURE

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): I'll now invite our next presenters to please come forward: Mr. McCabe and Mr. Nokes of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Welcome, colleagues. You've seen the drill: five minutes opening address, rotation by questions. Please just intro-

duce yourselves for the purposes of Hansard. Please begin now.

Mr. Don McCabe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. My name's Don McCabe. I'm president of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture. Accompanying me today is Ian Nokes, one of our policy researchers, and his expertise is the energy area.

We're very pleased to be able to comment today on Bill 13. First of all, to put it in context, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture has the opportunity to represent 36,000 farm families across the province. These farm businesses are the backbone of your rural economy and, most importantly, they're your number one economic driver in this province, with just over \$36 billion from farm gate to finished product. Therefore, the issue of hydro rates and their impact on competitiveness is of very much concern to the number one industry in this province.

Our ability to be able to choose competitively priced, efficient and reliable energy solutions has been a major factor when we have to look at the opportunities to expand our businesses when we have requests to do so, just not in terms of good business practice but in requests and meeting other statements like the Premier's challenge to expand the ag industry.

We listened with strong interest to the recent throne speech, and this issue of having a rebate directly for small business and residential electricity bills in the amount equal to the provincial portion of the harmonized sales tax is a nice step in the right direction. In all reality, as farmers, we were already receiving that 8% back. We had to pay it, but we would apply to get it back for our farm operations. Having it extended to rural residences and whatever is nice, but it was already there.

The other aspect of this, the further 12% that's coming along: Well, yes, it's a nice start in the right direction, but by the same token, this better be an opportunity for us to be thinking about real reductions in hydro rates, just not tampering with the edges on a non-stop basis. To that, I also add now the issue of stopping the procurement of large-scale projects. If it's only going to get you \$2.54 off a bill, that still isn't enough to show up at a Starbucks store. The reality is, we're just not dealing with the issues in the longer term.

The other portions of that throne speech have brought out the existing rural or remote electricity plan protection program for eligible R2 rural customers—\$45 per customer. Again, our businesses are multi-million dollar businesses, and when you have folks out there who are dealing with anywhere from a very minimum \$500-a-month bill up to \$75,000 for some farm families, because that's what their business does, this isn't coming close to addressing the issue.

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Also, as we move forward, the issue of expanding the eligibility for the industrial conservation initiative by bringing it down to one megawatt—all that really does is transfer the global adjustment from those folks who were at those higher uses onto the remaining customers, and again, this does not really solve the problems.

We appreciate that the idea is being heard—that there's an issue out there with hydro rates—but we also have to remember the best time to plant a tree was 30 years ago, the next best time is tomorrow and the worst time to plant one is when the fricking forest fire is here. It's time to move on and get back to the longer-term issues in dealing with hydro rates. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, colleagues. We'll move now to the PC side. Mr. Yakabuski.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Don and Ian, for joining us today. I appreciate your humour. Sometimes, you have a unique way of putting things, but I think it's very effective.

You talked a lot about the programs that, while maybe not directly embedded in the bill, are part of this new plan surrounding Bill 13. You talked about how it might help one and hurt another. Some people describe those as shell games. In fact, it does get described sometimes as a shell game, where it's, "Move the pieces around a little bit here, and hopefully a new message goes out to the public"—but it looks like the folks at the OFA are not really overly impressed by that.

I think it's fair to say everybody is happy to get an 8% reduction on their hydro bill but, as you say, it's not really addressing the fundamental issues in the energy sector that have the greatest impact on your members. Is that fair to say?

Mr. Don McCabe: That is a correct statement from the perspective that we are here to help look for those long-term solutions to actually start impacting rates and not just move percentages around.

From the issue of relating this to a shell game, I would offer that some of our producers are excellent nut growers and they know what to do with shells, and that's usually grind them up and turn them into something valuable.

Mr. John Yakabuski: There you go. Well, Don and Ian, I do thank you for coming today and helping us with this perspective. You people have been tremendous advocates for more sound, better energy policy when it comes to your membership across this great province. We thank you for continuing to advocate for your people.

Mr. Don McCabe: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Yakabuski.

To Mr. Tabuns: three minutes.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Don, Ian, thank you very much for coming here today. Do you have any amendments to this bill that you would like to propose?

Mr. Don McCabe: The width and breadth of this bill I don't think really lend themselves to amendments that would have any long-term impact. I would dearly hope that the issue of a long-term energy plan has been floated a number of times recently. The reality is that we've been down this road of doing a long-term energy plan many times before, and so far, the only people that I think are making money are Staples, because paper doesn't refuse ink.

The reality has to become, let's put one together that's going to address issues of long-term energy planning—

and they're going to be able to pick up on the issue that, as farmers, we are your backbone economic driver. We also work in a system where there's only one rule: Mother Nature wins. We have to be able to then have—to paraphrase Pierre Elliott Trudeau's son, it's 2016. Why don't I have a 2016 infrastructure?

The issue of getting a long-term energy plan in place that would actually acknowledge and move investments along in a timely manner means that I don't need to be amending a bill that's just moving percentages.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay. Do you have a sense of what percentage of your members will actually receive this 20% reduction in their hydro bills?

Mr. Don McCabe: I would guesstimate it would be all of them, and if I'm off the mark, Ian, step in please.

Mr. Ian Nokes: Basically all of our members are R2 customers, so we anticipate they all will get the \$45 a month.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: So they're in low-enough-density areas, then.

Mr. Ian Nokes: Most farmers are in the—

Mr. Peter Tabuns: They're in the lowest density. Okay.

The cancellation of the large renewable procurement program: I understand from a report on TVOntario that the \$2.45 that will be saved would be effective in 2032. I'm assuming that's not of consequence to your members.

Mr. Don McCabe: The way things are going, that could be the exchange rate between Canada and the US at that point. I don't think it's going to have much of a difference.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: The last thing I'd just like you to comment on: You mentioned that the shifting peak costs of those who have one megawatt of consumption or more just moves the cost of the peak expenses around. Could you comment or enlarge on that a bit?

Mr. Don McCabe: Well, if I was sitting in a chair and had to look at the entire hydro system, and I'm moving this box this way and that box that way, then the spreadsheet has to change—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you. Let's move the floor now to the government side. Mr. Potts.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Thank you, Don and Ian, for being here. I very much enjoy our opportunities to work towards a better energy future through the long-term energy planning process. I appreciated your continued offer to participate in that program as it comes forward. You may already be thinking about things that we could be doing in the long-term energy plan, but let's just stick to this bill.

I think you're right: It is of simplistic nature that, "Hey, we're just giving everybody 8%," and for those and almost all of your members—all 36,000—we're adding an additional 12%. As you said, it's a nice step in the right direction. That's very important, because you represent farmers in their capacities as business owners, but also individuals who run households. I think you're

hearing that this is something that needed to happen, but there's more that needs to be done.

What are the kinds of things that you might think we should be doing in terms of moving forward and making the system more efficient or cost-effective?

Mr. Don McCabe: Well, I think that one of the issues that doesn't usually get touched on is this issue of surplus power. First of all, let's stop doing the blame game on where the surplus power came from. I'm pretty sure there's not a heck of a lot of surplus power coming from solar at midnight, and I'm fairly certain it doesn't blow every night at 3 in the morning either. The reality is, it doesn't matter where it came from. Stop the blame game and start to give the opportunity for surplus power to be used by people who wish to expand in this province, regardless of the industry sector. Give them a break, first and foremost, and look then at the issue of why that power is still here and start bringing it down.

The issue about rebuilding infrastructure: An earlier speaker here already covered the issue of, "Let's invest when it's needed and when it's required." Rural Ontario desperately needs those infrastructure investments. We've paid our way in a number of different aspects through Hydro One prior to this point. The issue is, you still need to make sure your most vibrant industry out there has the best it can offer to be able to bring you back the best you need.

Mr. Arthur Potts: Right. And the comment you made about going to the one-megawatt threshold—the benefit of doing that, of course, is that it takes down the level of peak power, so that you don't have to bring on new expensive generation during peak moments. When you get a history of the peak demand periods going down, then you're saving money on more expensive last-minute generation.

Of course, it doesn't resolve the fact of excess baseload, potentially, which might get spread around, but it does mean that—and we saw that in the first program: that a lot of peak demand was removed from the system, which was very beneficial to the system, albeit some part of that, yes, has to be absorbed by the remaining players. When you just—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Potts, and thanks to you, Mr. McCabe and Mr. Nokes, for your deputation on behalf of the Ontario Federation of Agriculture.

MR. TOM DYMENT

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): We move now to our next presenter, who comes via teleconference: Mr. Tom Dymont. Are you there, Mr. Dymont?

Mr. Tom Dymont: Yes, I am.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Sorry, if you could just try to speak up; it's a little bit hard to hear you.

You'll have five minutes for an opening address and then a rotation of questions of three minutes each. I invite you please to begin now.

Mr. Tom Dymont: I'd like to say thank you to the members of the committee for allowing me to make this

presentation. As a citizen who resides in this province, this is the first time that I've participated in a forum like this, so I hope to adequately express my public input regarding the subject bill within the scope of this call, which is Bill 13, the Ontario Rebate for Electricity Consumers Act, 2016.

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My concern is simply this: that the provincial HST rebate, as proposed in the bill, does not go nearly far enough to address the onerous costs that many hydro customers are facing. Therefore, I'd suggest that the bill be sent back for changes or scrapped entirely and replaced with a new bill which adequately describes the systemic causes of the recent increases in cost to the consumer.

I base this statement on the following four contentions:

(1) Electricity is a recognized basic necessity for the vast majority of people in this province, and as such, should not be subject to the HST. Therefore, rebating the provincial portion of this cost does not relieve the consumers of the financial burden because this cost should never have been applied to hydro invoices in the first place.

(2) The portion of the invoice cost for energy delivery is excessive for customers in rural areas of the province. Under the present billing structure, it is unfair and punitive because, again, as a basic necessity, there is no uniformity of burden for hydro infrastructure costs across rural and urban settings within the billing structure.

(3) Consumers were encouraged to reduce hydro use, and over the years there has been a significant reduction in hydro demand as people have met their civic obligation and in good faith have saved energy and continue to do so. However, through the present billing structure of the global adjustment fee and the, as previously stated, unbalanced distribution costs, many Ontarians are being structurally punished for doing the right thing. In fact, if they increase their energy consumption, they are proportionately better off from a billing perspective, which I believe is counterproductive to the goals of the green energy program.

(4) Finally, in my opinion, this bill is, as presented, somewhat of a knee-jerk reaction to the public outrage that has been expressed over the present situation of energy costs and is considered to be politically expedient rather than thoughtfully addressing the concerns of the people of Ontario.

In summarizing my concerns about this bill, I rely on some media sources to put this issue in perspective from the view of a ratepayer and a taxpayer who resides in this province. A recent Ipsos poll on behalf of Global News indicates that just over half of Ontarians say that the rebate recently announced in the government's throne speech does not go far enough. Another recent headline in the National Post states, "Ontarians Have Never Been This Angry," and respondents to an Innovative Research Group poll feel unprotected from power price increases.

I too share these conclusions, and I respectfully urge the committee to carefully consider the inadequacy of the

proposed bill to address the root causes of the rising energy costs in this province.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you. Moving now to the NDP: Mr. Tabuns, three minutes.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Mr. Dymont, for your presentation today. I don't have any questions on what you've presented. You've been pretty straightforward. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Tabuns.

Mr. Dymont, you move now to the government side. Mr. Delaney.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Mr. Dymont, you gave us a very thoughtful presentation.

A couple of questions for you: Of electricity usage, what proportion do you think should be paid by the user of the electricity and what proportion should be a taxpayer subsidy?

Mr. Tom Dymont: I believe that the portion of actual hydro consumed in kilowatt hours should be paid by the customer, and that the balance should be distributed by the utility.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Do you believe, then, that users of electricity should pay for transmission, or should that be a public subsidy?

Mr. Tom Dymont: I believe that should be a public subsidy.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Okay. Thank you, Chair. Those are all my questions.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Delaney.

To the PC side: Mr. Yakabuski.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Dymont, for joining us by teleconference today and for your thoughtful comments. Three big problems that you looked at and talked about as far as I can see were the delivery portion of the bill, particularly for those in rural communities—would that be straight or fair?

Mr. Tom Dymont: Yes, that would be correct.

Mr. John Yakabuski: The “use less, pay more” penalty that people seemed to experience this past year?

Mr. Tom Dymont: Yes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: And what you consider as a knee-jerk political reaction to finally recognizing that there's an electricity crisis in this province?

Mr. Tom Dymont: That's correct.

Mr. John Yakabuski: On the delivery: Are you a rural customer yourself?

Mr. Tom Dymont: No, I am not.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You're not. But I trust that you have these discussions with many people who are rural customers.

Mr. Tom Dymont: Yes, I do. Yes, I personally know many friends who live in rural areas. I live in Grimsby, basically at the interface between the urban area and rural area in this province.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Exactly. When you look at your own hydro bill, Mr. Dymont—have you lived in the same location for the last five years or, say, since 2010?

Mr. Tom Dymont: Yes, I have.

Mr. John Yakabuski: What would your hydro bill be today relative to what it was in 2010?

Mr. Tom Dymont: I haven't quantified that as an increase. I do know it has increased and the increases have been significant, although not as great as some others I know in the rural areas.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Are your living circumstances the same—using about the same amount of power as you would have six years ago?

Mr. Tom Dymont: Yes, I would say about the same; perhaps a bit less, as I've implemented saving devices in the home.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Right. When you talk to your friends and neighbours and you talk about issues that are frustrating them the most, in the hierarchy of 1 being most frustrating and 10 as least frustrating, where would the issue of electricity pricing rank among those people that you have a regular discussion with on this issue?

Mr. Tom Dymont: Oh, I would say on a scale of 1 to 10, probably an 8.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Pardon me?

Mr. Tom Dymont: On a scale of 1 of 10, that would be an 8.

Mr. John Yakabuski: I'm saying 1 being most frustrating and 10 being least frustrating.

Mr. Tom Dymont: I understand. Then that would be the reverse. That would be a 2.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Dymont, for joining us today. We appreciate your input.

Mr. Tom Dymont: You're welcome. Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Yakabuski, and thanks to you, Mr. Dymont, for your deputation.

UNITED WAY BRUCE GREY

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): We now invite our next presenter to please come forward: Ms. Francesca Dobbyn, United Way of Bruce Grey executive director.

Welcome. Ms. Dobbyn. You've seen the drill. I know you know your way around here. Please go ahead—five minutes.

Ms. Francesca Dobbyn: My name is Francesca, and I'm the executive director of the United Way of Bruce Grey.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to Bill 13. For 10 years, the United Way of Bruce Grey, in very rural Ontario, has been delivering various programs to reduce the impact of energy poverty in Bruce and Grey counties. We started 10 years ago delivering relief to Union Gas customers, expanded to Hydro One a couple of years later, and, with the full implementation of the LEAP program under the Poverty Reduction Strategy, we added Westario Power to our program. At that time, we also recognized that those truly rural sources of heat—furnace oil, cord wood and propane—do not have dedicated funding streams, so we started to fundraise to assist those households.

For the 12 months from July 1, 2015, through to June 30, 2016, in partnership with other agencies in our community—YMCA Housing Services, Salvation Army Wiarton and the Bruce and Grey county social services departments who administer the CHPI funding—and including all the agency resources of staffing, technology, time etc., over \$1 million was expensed to assist with energy poverty in our region. Understand: The population of our community is 160,000 people.

The United Way has been a strong advocate in addressing energy poverty both locally and provincially. My remarks from this point on will focus strictly on the electricity needs of our community, not because other utility needs are not important but because they are irrelevant to the discussion of Bill 13.

On a daily basis, we receive crisis calls from people who have received disconnection notices, who are in the process of being disconnected or who have been disconnected from their electrical services. We have seen equal billing invoices in excess of mortgage payments. We have referred more and more people to food banks and other resources to cover their daily costs as more and more household funds are used to pay for electricity. Sometimes their only option is to walk away from their homes and find all-inclusive apartments, only to discover that most apartment complexes are now suite-metered.

When the consumption of electricity is about \$80 with global adjustment but the delivery is \$120, advising people to reduce usage even further will have little impact on their subsequent bills but a significant impact on their lifestyle. We should not live in a society where unplugging a 220 plug on your stove so the clock isn't active—that should not be normal, but that's the accusation around phantom power.

I am currently trying to assist a woman who has been told that her equal billing for her home is \$491 for a small bungalow on the Bruce Peninsula as a single occupant. With ODSP providing \$1,200 for the month and her reasonable mortgage that's under \$500, what's left for her in her budget for life?

In the past four months, Global News and other media sources have enabled us to tell the story of rural energy poverty in a way that has not been available to us in the past. The subsequent proroguing of the government and the throne speech have demonstrated to us that, finally, rural Ontario is being heard on this issue.

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We are pleased to support the relief that has been proposed and encapsulated in Bill 13. While 8% doesn't seem like much, it's a start, and we have to start somewhere. The changes to the RRRP should mean significant relief to low-density rural customers. We are anxious to see this bill pass so that the mechanisms can be in place for January implementation.

We know that we're nowhere near finished with energy poverty. There are gaps and opportunities still to explore, but for today, we can support the efforts to date.

We look forward to being a resource and are more than willing to provide realistic and impactful informa-

tion for on-the-ground implementation of ideas, programs and whatever else the government and energy sector chooses to do, or chooses not to do, as it relates to energy poverty.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Ms. Dobbyn.

To the government side: Mr. Delaney.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you very much, especially for your description of the situation in Bruce Peninsula. Do you work with people to ensure that, in the course of filling out their taxes, they qualify for the seniors' energy and property tax credit?

Ms. Francesca Dobbyn: We don't actually run the income tax program. There are income tax programs in our community, and we are aware that they're highly trained on all of those pieces.

I've included in my package that was handed out to you, on page 10, the list of all of the supports. Quite often, a client will come in, looking for support on one issue, and we can help them apply for five different programs in a single meeting.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Is Hydro One the local distributor?

Ms. Francesca Dobbyn: We have two local distributors. We have Westario Power in the southern parts of the two counties. Hydro One is the main one for the balance of the community.

Mr. Bob Delaney: I'm not familiar with the first one; I am somewhat familiar with the second. Have you engaged both local distributors to ensure that local residents are taking full advantage of the assistance and rebate programs that likely both of them offer?

Ms. Francesca Dobbyn: Absolutely. We have actually implemented in our community and piloted, in Bruce-Grey, calling 211 Ontario as the intake agency for all of our utility programs. They may call 211 to access our program, but because of the expertise in the 211 system, they also get referred out to all of the other programs.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Okay. Thank you, Chair. Those were my questions.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Delaney.

To the PC side: Mr. Yakabuski.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Ms. Dobbyn, for joining us today and for the work that you do with the United Way in Bruce-Grey. We're thankful for the United Way in Renfrew county as well and recognize the work that they do, which is not dissimilar to what you do and not a dissimilar basic issue that we're dealing with on a regular basis.

We're all supportive of the 8% rebate. I know that you came out and publicly supported it when it was introduced, and we appreciate that. But when I look at the extent of the energy poverty file that you work with, it is daunting.

Ms. Francesca Dobbyn: It's huge, as they say.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Huge. It is daunting. This 8% rebate is something that is going to be welcomed by everybody who gets a bill; we understand that. But this

file is probably one of the biggest ones you work with today.

Ms. Francesca Dobbyn: It represents a third of our programming.

Mr. John Yakabuski: A third of your programming. Energy pricing affects all the people who make donations to the United Way, and their employees. They're all affected by energy poverty one way or another as well—maybe not at the poverty level, but their ability to make donations to the United Way is affected by the energy prices that they pay.

Would it fair to say that, with or without this rebate, next year and the year after, unless things change dramatically, this will still be the biggest single file that you work on?

Ms. Francesca Dobbyn: Absolutely, this will be our biggest single file, not just for electricity but natural gas and those traditional rural heat sources.

Energy poverty will continue to be an issue. Income levels, precarious work and all those social issues are having a major impact. We're seeing a reduction in donations as those donors are experiencing the same challenging issues with their own household disposable-income budgets.

Mr. John Yakabuski: And the businesses as well.

Ms. Francesca Dobbyn: Absolutely.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you so much for joining us today, Ms. Dobbyn. We really do appreciate your input and the work that you do for the people in Bruce-Grey.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Yakabuski.

To Mr. Tabuns.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Chair. Ms. Dobbyn, it's very nice to meet you in person.

Ms. Francesca Dobbyn: Yes. Happy birthday.

Interjections.

Ms. Francesca Dobbyn: Yes.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: It's amazing what this will do to Hansard.

Anyway, I appreciate your presentation. I have a few questions. Are there any amendments to this bill that you would recommend?

Ms. Francesca Dobbyn: The only thing we would be looking for—and I know it's possibly encapsulated in Bill 218, the burden reduction bill—is the complete policy agreement of to not disconnect people in winter. Our small local distributor company does disconnect in winter. Hydro One does not; Union Gas does not. But the smaller organizations, especially those that are municipally owned and, therefore, accountable to their municipal shareholders, will disconnect in winter, and that's a major concern. When those calls come into our office, no matter what we're doing, we stop everything to try and get that truck back out to that household and get them reconnected when it's minus 18.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Absolutely. I understand.

You talk about the rural rate reduction. What percentage of the people in your community will be supported

by that further reduction that has been promised by the government?

Ms. Francesca Dobbyn: I would suggest at this time that it would be fairly considerable: probably 30% to 40% of our community. The city of Owen Sound is urban density. Our small towns—Kincardine, Wiarton, Meaford—are all medium density. It's those outlying areas—especially those areas that are not in the natural gas shadow and have no access and have no choice. The woman I spoke to with the \$20,000 bill has an electric hot water tank and no other choice. That's 12 kilowatts a day just to have hot water. So having that alternative to go to something else is not available in those communities and in those rural side roads.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Okay. I think those are the questions I had. I really appreciate you taking the long trip down here. It was good of you.

Ms. Francesca Dobbyn: Oh, it has been a long trip. I was in Alberta yesterday, so it has been a long trip.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Well, that's a longer commute than I generally think of.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Tabuns, and thanks to you, Ms. Dobbyn, for your deputation and presence.

MR. DOUG STEELE

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): We move to our next presenter, Mr. Doug Steele, via teleconference. Are you there, Mr. Steele?

Mr. Doug Steele: I am here.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Great. You have five minutes to make an opening address; rotation by questions, three minutes. I'd invite you to please begin now.

Mr. Doug Steele: Thank you for providing an opportunity to comment on the proposed legislation. My name is Doug Steele. I'm a resident of Woodstock, Ontario. My concern is around the significant increases that have happened with hydro over a very short period of time. Our personal home bill—and I'm not talking about anything else other than residential—has increased 56% this year. There have already been three price increases in 2016. We don't look forward to another price increase this year, which we understand may happen in November. I am a retired worker on a fixed income, and it makes it extremely difficult to go from that much of a change in the monthly hydro bill.

Prior to this year, the steps taken at our residence were that we have done the things we've been requested to do to conserve energy, such as an insulation upgrade in the portions of our unit that we live in. In 2014, we purchased a new heat and air conditioning system. We've purchased new appliances. In our household, we've changed over to either LED or CFL lighting on all fixtures. For each of these steps that we've taken to conserve energy as requested not only by the province but by service providers, we've received rebates in differing amounts on this. So we've done our part to conserve

energy in this province, but yet we are continually faced with increasing hydro bills.

In our estimation, the 8% HST is a first step, but it will not go far enough for Ontario users, and there need to be immediate responses taken to deal with the issue of Ontario Hydro.

That concludes my opening comments. I'd just like to also mention that Ontario has had some of the finest hydro infrastructure and policies in North America. However, it is time to fix the problems facing residents in our province. It's time to fix the policies that have led us here, and it's time to implement change immediately to build a future that assists communities, jobs, the environment and the economy, and we need to start today.

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The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Steele. I offer you to the Conservative side.

Mr. Yakabuski, three minutes.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Mr. Steele, for your presentation today. I sense a certain frustration in your voice with respect to where you are today and energy bills in Ontario. Can you give me an idea of where you were in 2010, for example, with respect to your hydro bills, versus today?

Mr. Doug Steele: They would have increased 100%.

Mr. John Yakabuski: One hundred per cent?

Mr. Doug Steele: Easily, easily.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You said you're a senior on a fixed income?

Mr. Doug Steele: That's correct.

Mr. John Yakabuski: How has your income gone up in that time?

Mr. Doug Steele: Sir, it has not, with the exception of a minor Canada Pension Plan adjustment.

Mr. John Yakabuski: So, very little.

Mr. Doug Steele: Very little.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Very little, but your energy costs have doubled.

Mr. Doug Steele: They have doubled and from what I'm observing I do not see, with the current policies in place and the direction that Hydro is taking, that there would be any change. This is just not to us. This is just not about the 8% HST reduction. It goes farther, to a structural problem with Ontario Hydro.

Mr. John Yakabuski: A structural problem with Ontario? When you say Ontario Hydro, would it be fair to say you mean Ontario's energy policies?

Mr. Doug Steele: As well as the energy policies, because I see those as two different things. Although the intention, I guess, is still that people have a reliable of source of hydro, it sees things and interference from committees or boards, like the Ontario Energy Board, that seem to rubber-stamp any approval for rate increases that Ontario Hydro brings to them. They haven't taken any steps to lower hydro rates or increase conservation programs or eliminate excess capacity.

It's my understanding that on a daily basis Ontario produces more electricity than it uses. It's time to stop that.

Mr. John Yakabuski: There's certainly a lot of electricity produced that is given away or traded at a very low price to other jurisdictions, and that certainly does affect your price at the end of the day. It's all moulded into the global adjustment.

Are you a Hydro One customer or are you with another LDC?

Mr. Doug Steele: We are now part of—

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Yakabuski.

The floor now moves, Mr. Steele, to the NDP. Mr. Tabuns, three minutes.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Mr. Steele, thank you for joining us this afternoon. I appreciated your presentation. I don't have any questions for you.

Mr. Doug Steele: Okay.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Tabuns.

To the government side: Mr. Delaney.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Mr. Steele, as a retiree, are you eligible for the Ontario Trillium Benefit, which includes the Ontario senior energy and property tax credits?

Mr. Doug Steele: Unfortunately, I am not. I just have a little bit higher income than that program. It would seem that the ceilings on these programs also need to be adjusted, which would be part of the structural problem facing most people in Ontario these days.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Okay. Are you eligible for the Ontario Electricity Support Program that is offered province-wide?

Mr. Doug Steele: We are not.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you, Chair. Those are all of my questions.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you, Mr. Delaney, and thanks to you, Mr. Steele, for your deputiation via teleconference.

MS. LYNDA SMITH

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Now I invite our final presenter of the day, Ms. Lynda Smith, also by teleconference. Ms. Smith, are you there?

Ms. Lynda Smith: Yes, I am.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qaadri): Thank you. We'll invite you to make your opening remarks for five minutes—and then rotations of questions, each party three minutes. Please begin now.

Ms. Lynda Smith: Thank you. My name is Lynda Smith. I farm in Grey Highlands, and I'm a senior citizen. Now, it may not mean much to Ontario Hydro executives and others on the sunshine list, or those in the provincial government, but a lot of us in Ontario struggle financially from day to day. Too many of us—not just seniors—have had to make a choice between groceries, heat or hydro.

The Liberal government proposes to give us back the 8% of the GST that we never should have been charged in the first place, and which was taken away by the same government. For this, we're supposed to be grateful.

We in rural Ontario are supposed to get a further 20% reduction. How wonderful is that? Rural Ontario is already paying far more than urban centres. From what I've read and from what I've paid, electricity costs in the last 12 years that this government has been in power have gone up around 400%. That's over 25% a year.

Nowhere did I read where the multi-million dollar costs come from to cover this—because when you give us money, you have to take it away from us somewhere else. Where is this money going to come from? It stands to reason that if I'm going to be getting a government hand-up of 25% off of hydro, I'm just going to have to be paying it somewhere else. I guess maybe that's part of the reason my licence just cost me \$140.

We're paying for wind and solar experiments when we could have been buying hydro from Quebec. But no, we sell it for pennies to the US. The majority of people in rural Ontario do not believe in this government's ability to manage the business of this province.

Another thing I've read is that the province of Ontario is the only one that has a delivery charge, and no other province has a line loss charge. Why is that? There are many stories of people who have had their hydro shut off and are still receiving hydro bills with delivery charges. That's unbelievable.

What are we actually going to do? Will this government state, without ambiguity, that before Bill 13 is passed, they will set a target so that affordable electricity means that everybody in Ontario can afford to pay for their hydro? That would be a start for this government—a binding promise that from this day on, the people of Ontario will not be in arrears on their hydro bills and people will not have their power disconnected in the cold of winter, or have to make that choice between having food on the table or freezing in their homes.

My friend in Saskatchewan pays about \$137 for 1,000 kilowatt hours. In Ontario, it would be \$250 or more. I read that 567,000 people in Ontario still can't pay their hydro bills with all of your programs, and 60,000 people can't have any power whatsoever in spite of your programs.

The agenda that this government has and continues to try to finagle on the people of Ontario has been and is thoroughly rejected, as demonstrated by the overwhelming booing from the people in the audience at the plowing match. The people of Ontario have been slighted by a neglectful and oblivious government whose policies have miserably failed. Is it any wonder why Premier Wynne has the abysmal approval rating that she does? Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Ms. Smith.

To the NDP: Mr. Tabuns.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: Ms. Smith, thank you very much for your presentation. I think you've made your points well. I have no questions.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Tabuns.

To the government side: Mr. Delaney.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Just a couple of questions, Ms. Smith: Do you live in an apartment unit or a single-family home?

Ms. Lynda Smith: I'm a farmer, sir. I farm in Grey Highlands.

Mr. Bob Delaney: How many kilowatt hours in your home would you consume in the course of a month, or a billing period, if it's two months?

Ms. Lynda Smith: Well, that's kind of a funny question to ask, because actually, I try not to have any lights on and I don't have my heat on right now. I try to keep it at the minimum. It's been about the same for a long time, but the fact is, I'm using less and less hydro and I'm still being charged the same, so I go without. My furnace isn't on yet. I don't have air conditioning in the summer. We just do with less to keep the same kind of rates.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Who is your distributor? Is it Hydro One or is it a local utility?

Ms. Lynda Smith: Hydro One, sir.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Have you checked with them to see what energy savings and other programs they have, both for your farm and for your home?

Ms. Lynda Smith: Well, I've applied for the \$30 discount, which does help. Last year, I actually had to go to the United Way to get an \$800 bill paid or I was having my hydro cut off in the middle of winter.

Mr. Bob Delaney: Thank you, Chair. Those are the questions that the government had.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): To the PC side: Mr. Yakabuski.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Thank you very much, Ms. Smith, for joining us today. Did you say you're in Grey county?

Ms. Lynda Smith: Yes, sir, Grey Highlands.

Mr. John Yakabuski: So your United Way executive director was here earlier, Ms. Dobbyn.

Ms. Lynda Smith: I don't know the lady, but I know I did get assistance from the United Way. If it hadn't have been for them, I wouldn't have had any hydro at all.

Mr. John Yakabuski: How many people do you know—forgive me for being presumptuous, but this is such a hot topic, particularly in rural Ontario, that I don't think people are living on an island when it comes to hydro issues. Can you tell me how many people you know that are going through similar circumstances such as you, Ms. Smith, when it comes to trying to pay skyrocketing hydro bills under these energy policies?

Ms. Lynda Smith: Oh, there are so many. It's not just seniors; it's families with children and people that have to choose paying their rent or paying their hydro, even people in apartments, houses—I would say at least 70% of the people I talk to.

And the waste with the turbines, the big fiasco there: People are just fed up at how they're being treated. They feel like they're being ignored. It's terrible.

Mr. John Yakabuski: So this 8% rebate—which, as you know, was announced shortly after the by-election results in Scarborough–Rouge River—do you think it's going to amount to anything significant for people, or is

this more just about messaging than it is about really helping people?

Ms. Lynda Smith: Oh, what is 8% going to do? They took it away from us, now they're giving it back: 8% is nothing. How much is hydro going to go up again, and again? The 8% will be nothing.

Mr. John Yakabuski: It's going up November 1.

Ms. Lynda Smith: Exactly. And it'll probably go up again next year. It'll probably go up again in January.

We're paying more than any of the other provinces. It's not just anybody's imagination. I haven't talked to anybody—my neighbours; other farmers; other seniors: We're all disgusted. It's just a terrible and unnecessary burden that's being placed on the people in this province.

Mr. John Yakabuski: Ms. Smith, thank you so much for your input today. I hope that the members on the other side of this table are listening closely.

Ms. Lynda Smith: I hope so too, sir. Thank you so much.

Mr. John Yakabuski: You have a great day.

Ms. Lynda Smith: Thank you.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): Thank you, Mr. Yakabuski. Thanks to you, Ms. Smith.

Once again, Mr. Tabuns, the committee wishes you a happy birthday. In the interests of transparency and accountability I was wondering if you'd like to make a disclosure regarding that particular birthday, which has been referred to all day long.

Mr. Peter Tabuns: No, I'm going to be non-transparent on this.

The Chair (Mr. Shafiq Qadri): All right. Thank you. Committee's adjourned.

The committee adjourned at 1723.

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